Pinnip Pinainthu Kidakkum Oorangattthalkalai Kattudaiththal:

Reimagining Social Activism with Intersectional Subaltern Activist Consciousness

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

at

The University of Waikato

by

CAYATHRI DIVAKALALA

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2023

TO ACTIVISTS, FREEDOM FIGHTERS, REFORMISTS, AND CHANGE MAKERS.

ABSTRACT

People have been marginalised and oppressed due to their beliefs, identities, and expressions based on race, ethnicity, sex, gender, language, religion, class, caste, disability, neurodiversity, and sexuality for centuries. In Sri Lanka, these are deeply rooted and intertwined with historical violence, colonisation, and generational pain and suffering. Every instance of marginalisation and oppression, especially in the North and the East of this war-torn 'teardrop island' in the Indian Ocean, is a product of multiple crimes against humanity at various levels. Alongside marginalisations and oppressions exist the powerful instances, journeys, and stories of resistance, social organising, celebrations, and social movement building based on a profound sense of solidarity. Over the years, they have produced many seedlings of manifestations that keep these powerful instances alive and continually evolving. This doctoral thesis is one such seedling.

Driven by the desire to theorise with subaltern activist journeys, this thesis explores the textures and contours of social activism organised by young trans, intersex and women activists from the margins who seek social justice in post-war Northern Sri Lanka. It searches for voices and experiences pushed to the margins by hegemonic and destructive powers and structures of society. By treating them as credible knowers, the thesis co-weaves a metaphorical mat of activist consciousness to argue i) particular experiences of subalternity emerge in post-war justice movements, ii) activist consciousnesses are shaped by everyday struggles that are constantly changing and evolving as activists navigate precarious living due to multiple and intersecting forms of marginalisation, iii) activists engage in reactive and proactive processes to manifest purposes beyond their differences and challenge forms of marginalisation, address the legacies of differences, and work towards justice and changes, iv) collaborative consciousness promotes collective growth, v) activists produce imaginaries of justice beyond binary thinking and understanding of their social worlds, and vi) critiquing practices aimed at critical reflections on the self as well collectives deepen understanding of the subalternity of social transformations. Conceptual frameworks from particular subaltern locations and histories substantiate these claims. The thesis concludes with suggestions for future researchers to further generate knowledge in collaboration with collective social processes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I wish to thank all co-weavers of *Reimagining Social Activism with Intersectional Subaltern Activist Consciousness* – my research participants. I am incredibly grateful for the trust you placed in me and in this doctoral research project. Your wisdom, vision, firm sense of hope, and solidarity are nourishing and profoundly inspiring.

All PhD journeys are profoundly emotional and intellectual, and some, like this one, are also political. Having supportive and responsive supervisors, especially in the case of the primary supervisor, is key to completing such an undertaking. I am indebted to my primary supervisor, Dr Adele Norris, for her constructive and critical feedback and mindful nudges throughout this journey. As my external supervisor, Dr Garrick Cooper was there when needed and supported my journey with his mana. Kia ora, Dr Cooper.

A special thank you to Paul Vincent, who proofread this thesis, and to Thisanthini Thiruchelvam, who assisted with some secondary data collection in Northern Sri Lanka after my fieldwork plans had to be altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you, Rachel Gosnell-Maddock (who no longer works there) and Rosie Webb, programme administrators in Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato | University of Waikato School of Social Sciences, and all the staff at the School of Graduate Research. Your administrative skills and timely replies made a real difference. Thank you also to Melanie Chivers and all the other staff at the university library.

My gratitude goes to Nurse Practitioner Carine Botha, who helped me sustain my physical and mental health as I journeyed through this endeavour. I also wish to thank all the staff at Student Health Services and all the specialists I have consulted over the years.

I thank all individuals, collectives, groups, organisations, trusts, communities, movements, institutions, and associations who have helped me grow, share, inspire, and aspire. Your interventions have helped me in the emotional, intellectual, sociocultural, political, and spiritual spheres. Based on these experiences, I will continue to learn and evolve for the better with a profound sense of collective consciousness.

I extend my gratitude to all teachers, academics, activist scholars, and researchers who have shaped my thinking, practices, and politics. There are too many to name here, because I see this thesis as one of the products of the many journeys I have been on since my formative years. Also, my academic training and activist engagements have been spread across continents and countries. I am indebted to non-human entities – flora and fauna – as well.

I am profoundly thankful to my loved ones – family, friends from various countries, and my newfound whānau in Aotearoa New Zealand. I am grateful for your love, compassion, trust, care, and support. Queer love and care are the most powerful!

Co-founding Adhikaar Aotearoa with my first person-of-colour queer friend in Aotearoa New Zealand, Vinod Bal, was profoundly moving and nourishing. Vinod's family welcomed me as their own, and I will forever be grateful to them. My continuous learning and sharing with Priyam Collective sustain me. My queer connections, collaborative work with Hohou Te Rongo Kahukura, and community connections through Shama Ethnic Women's Trust and Diversity Counselling New Zealand have provided a profound sense of community and sustenance. My research work on the Border and Boundary Making and Unmaking project with academics and researchers and some tutoring and guest lecturing in Waikato's Sociology, Social Policy, and Anthropology Departments expanded my horizons.

Learning to swim in my 40s was one of the healthy distractions that sustained me during this journey. Thank you to my dear friend, Camilla Carty-Melis, for being a constant support. Swimming and volunteering at the Serve Community Kitchen with Camilla provided me with significant mental health support throughout this journey.

My dad's health significantly deteriorated during the writing phase of this thesis. Fighting two aggressive cancers in his 80s has taken a lot out of him, and my mum, who is his primary carer and in her late 70s. A very special thanks to my parents and siblings for their understanding and encouragement at this critical time of our lives. I am indebted to all medical professionals, friends, extended family, and well-wishers caring for my parents. Writing a PhD thesis while managing the emotional turmoil caused by this situation, especially from afar, has been particularly challenging. Thank you, James Elam, for the care and support you offer at this crucial juncture of my life.

An update: My dad passed away eight days after I submitted this thesis for examination.

I am forever grateful to my soul's companion, Hasanah Cegu, from the depths of my heart, mind, and soul. My friends with doctorates felt their partners should have been given honorary PhDs for all the love, care, support and empathy they shared and extended. The labour of love, compassion, and patience, especially from afar, and the many other emotions involved, must be recognised and appreciated. Hasanah might have done a double PhD in my case. Hasanah, I have learned a lot from you, and I am sure I will continue to do so. Thank you for being uniquely you. I am not sure this very special thank you note covers how grateful I am for all that you have done and all that you are. But it is a start, I hope.

Finally, I acknowledge the tangata whenua of Aotearoa, iwi Māori. In particular, I acknowledge Waikato Tainui, whose land I am currently based and who helped bring forth this doctoral thesis, spiritually.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ABBREVIATIONS

AWARE	Association of Women for Action and Research
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEJ	Centre for Equality and Justice
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
GS	Grama Sevakar
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual, emerging ones
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam
MMDA	Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UTHR	University Teachers for Human Rights
WECAN	We Can End All Violence Against Women

PART I

CONTEXTUALISING INTERSECTIONAL MARGINALISATION AND POST-WAR ACTIVISM IN LANKA

This thesis begins by exploring the concept of intersectional marginalisation and post-war activism with a focus on geopolitical contextualisation. The first couple of chapters in Part I offer comprehensive theoretical framing and grounding of the subject area. I foreground academic literature produced in and on Lanka[1], especially by Lankan women academics, to expand the conceptual platform where insightful perspectives from the margins of society can be observed and analysed.

Chapter 1 historically located the geopolitical field of my thesis with a focus on the need to understand how violence is perpetrated by intersectional marginalisations in Northern Lanka. In addition to a history of colonisation stretching four and a half centuries, the concepts of violence and marginalisation have been informed by a decades-long ethnic war, several major natural disasters, and now the global pandemic. For example, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami took more human lives in the North and the East of the country, the areas of the country most afflicted by war and neglected by the state, than any other parts.

Chapter 2 located social activism in post-war Lanka and identified the various issues young activists address in working towards justice and social change. A gap in literature was revealed with regard to the experiences of trans and intersex activists, especially in the space of understanding and developing concepts and practices of social movement activism. By setting out to produce knowledge from certain subaltern locations, histories, and politics, I located this thesis as an act of resistance from which contributions to knowledge and practice are produced. Simultaneously, my thesis contributes to scholarly debates on the search for social justice by exploring how political praxis founded on collective consciousness and action is precipitated through the unlikeliest of solidarities in the context of post-war society. This exploration guides my analysis in Chapters 5–8, where I continually and consciously push the theoretical boundaries when attempting to understand concepts of social activism, activist consciousness, subalternity, and activist politics.

Part I ends by stating the main research question and highlighting the aim of filling a gap in knowledge related to social activism by shifting the focus to the margins of subaltern experiences of interlocking forms of discrimination.

[1] I use the name Lanka – the most ancient (Jayewardene, 2017) and, I believe, the indigenous name of this unique island with many potentials – in this thesis from this point onwards.

1

TROUBLED PEARL OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

> This colonial suspicion of the subject continues to be exercised in modern times against women and many other deviant and marginalized communities. (Thangarajah, 2016, p. 98)

1.1 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Lanka has often been described as "the pearl of the Indian Ocean". Throughout history, this island has had many different names, and in this thesis, I use one of the most ancient: Lanka, which simply means 'island'. This decision is not motivated by any nationalistic reasons. For four centuries, three colonial powers from the West colonised Lanka, starting with the Portuguese who arrived in 1505 and ruled until 1658, when the Dutch seized control and occupied the island between 1658 and 1796. Soon after, the British invaded and changed the name of the island to Ceylon. They ruled the entire island from 1815 to 1948, when it was granted independence as the Dominion of Ceylon. Dominion status within the British Commonwealth was retained for the next 24 years until 22 May 1972, when it became a republic and was renamed the Republic of Sri Lanka (meaning 'resplendent island'; see DeVotta, 2004; Sivasundaram, 2007).

Many other forms of oppression and rights violations have stained Lanka's postcolonial history, including (ultimately failed) insurgencies by Sinhalese communists in the Southern, Central, and Western regions in the 1970s and 1980s; a ruthless ethnic war[2] that raged from the early 1980s until May 2009 and killed at least 100,000; and the eviction of Muslims from the North of the island in 1990 ('Sri Lankan Civil War', 2022). Such a complex and brutal history has left a legacy of complex socio-political systems that has given rise to diverse forms of intersecting oppressions and legacies of differences along the lines of caste, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Arasaratnam, 1981; Bandarage, 2008; Chattoraj & Gerharz, 2019; de Alwis, 2012, 2019; de Mel, 2007; Ismail & Jeganathan, 1995; Jiggins, 1979; McGilvray, 1983; Mihlar, 2019; Parasram, 2017; Silva, 1999; S. J. Tambiah, 1986; Thiranagama, 2011; Wickramasinghe, 2006; Wilson, 1979).

Neil DeVotta (2004) historically locates the politicisation of ethnicity, class, and caste differences among Sinhalese, Tamils, and 'Indian Tamils', while pointing out that people have connected beyond the legacy of differences at different points in time for various purposes (DeVotta, 2004). In her ethnographic study, anthropologist Margaret Trawick (2007) points out that British rule and its legacy of colonial policy is among the leading causes of conflict in Lanka. The divisions reinforced by colonial rule have taken many forms and are deeply rooted in communities. Colonists brought new categories of thought for relating to one another in communities, which made it challenging to navigate across traditional differences based on

[2] Different adjectives describe the Lankan war. The marginalisation of ethnic minorities was the underlying reason for the war, and it was focused on furthering two ethnicities while silencing the concerns of ethnic minorities. I join a few scholars from Lanka who use the term 'ethnic war' to describe the complexity of this particular context.

class, caste, and ethnicity. The economic and political advances brought through colonial rule created Westernised elites, which, either by default or design, occurred along caste and ethnic lines, increasing the gap between the privileged and the non-privileged (Trawick, 2007).

Conflict has shaped the lives of Lankans ever since independence was gained from colonial rule. Ethnic clashes broke out immediately after the British departed (DeVotta, 2004; Perera-Rajasingham, 2019). Class, caste, gender, and ideology-based divisions also contributed to conflicts within and between communities of the same ethnicity. Memories of the structural and political violence of the time have been systematically erased (Jayasundara-Smits, 2022; Spencer, 2013a). In his foreword to a publication on one of the forgotten internal conflicts within the Sinhala community from the South of the country, Jonathan Spencer (2013b, p. 10) notes "the slow process of understanding the causes and consequences of political violence in post-independence Lanka". The publication tells compelling stories of everyday terror experienced by ordinary Sinhala people due to a political insurrection by the left-leaning Sinhala youth against the authoritarian Sinhala government in the late 1980s (Hughes, 2013).

There are many more stories of internal conflicts in this 'teardrop' island nation (Amarasingham, 2019) waiting to be explored. Old narrations of specific stories – such as the consequences of the ethnic conflict – need to be told from the perspectives that have been marginalised by the dominant discourses. As Spencer (2013b) notes, there have been a number of publications about these perspectives, including novels. However, understanding the nuances of these conflicts has been challenging, given that the country is still healing from many wounds (Goodhand et al., 2010; Jayasundara-Smits, 2022; Spencer et al., 2015).

Despite being a multi-ethnic country including Burghers, Malays, Muslims (Islam constitutes a category of ethnicity in the context of Lanka; see Sarjoon et al., 2016), and Tamils, the Sinhala Buddhist nationalistic values and norms have dominated Lanka's political and social landscapes since independence. The struggle against extreme marginalisation has manifested in various capacities. In the early 1980s, an armed group comprised of members of the largest minority ethnicity (Tamil Hindus and Catholics) called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)[3] began an ethnic war and demanded self-determination (de Mel et al., 2012; Nadarajah & Sriskandarajah, 2005).

The ethnic war ravaged Lanka from July 1983 to May 2009 (DeVotta, 2009; Jayasundara-Smits, 2022; Seoighe, 2017; Weerawardhana, 2019). The warring parties were the

[3] The LTTE was formed in 1972 and demanded a separate state (the Northern and Eastern regions of Lanka) for Tamils. For more information, see Mapping Militant Organizations (2018).

LTTE and the government. The population from the North and the East of the country – the majority of them Muslims and Tamils – bore the brunt of war. According to feminist scholar Sumathy Sivamohan (2016, p. 370), the war "was a complex web of criss-crossing ethnic antagonisms over the relations between the state and its citizenry". In 1981, the burning of the public library in Jaffna – in the Northern Province of Lanka – destroyed thousands of books and manuscripts and left a massive hole in the knowledge-based identity of Northern Tamils (Wilson, 2000).

In July 1983, the LTTE ambushed a Lankan army patrol convoy in Jaffna. Thirteen personnel were killed in the attack. In retaliation, Sinhala mobs rioted against Tamils in the South of the country for seven days. The state did not arrest the Sinhala rioters; instead of protecting the vulnerable population, the state was accused of providing the voting details of Tamils to the rioters, which facilitated their killings, mutilations, rapes, and lynchings. Many Tamil properties, including businesses, were set on fire (S. J. Tambiah, 1986). The records of these attacks were systematically erased by the state (DeVotta, 2000). Hence, no avenues for justice or reparation were available after the events of what is known as 'Black July' in the country (Chatterjee & Jeganathan, 2000).

In the late 1980s, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was finally brought in as an intervention to resolve the war, but their efforts only fuelled the conflict by quickly turning into a counterinsurgency operation (Chari, 1994; Hoole et al., 1990; Ouellet, 2011; Rupesinghe, 1988; Sivamohan, 2016). *The Broken Palmyrah*, an inside account of the atrocities authored by four dons from the University of Jaffna, "narrates the stories of several women molested during the peacekeeping operations of the Indian army in the North and East" (Sivamohan, 2016, p. 378). A group of activists and scholars from the North formed an organisation called University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) to expose the violations of all forms – including sexual violence against women – committed by both the IPKF and the LTTE (UTHR, 1989, 1999, 2005). In 1989, the renowned feminist activist-scholar and a medical professional Rajini Thiranagama was killed by the LTTE after she was brave enough to challenge them (Gowrinathan & Mampilly, 2019). The LTTE carried out several suicide bombings attacks and massacres of Sinhala and Muslim communities in the East and South, too (Sivamohan, 2016). It was also responsible for human rights violations (Hoole et al., 1990), the "killing of women for sexual transgressions" (Sivamohan, 2016, p. 384), the evicting of Northern Muslims in 1990 (Asees, 2015; Thiranagama, 2011, 2013), child recruitment (Becker, 2010), and, as we saw above, the assassination of Tamils who criticised them (Gowrinathan & Mampilly, 2019; Nesiah, 2013).

The government forces did not finally defeat the LTTE until May 2009 (Höglund & Orjuela, 2011; Weiss, 2011). However, internal ethnic conflict continues to escalate in the country beyond what Rajasingham-Senanayake (1999, p. 101) calls a "bi-polar ethnic imagination" dominated by the discourse of Sinhala versus Tamil nationalisms. The construct of nationalism is often gendered (de Mel, 2001; Maunaguru, 1995). Scholars have argued that the end of the ethnic war does not automatically mean peace or full resolution of ethnic conflict, which is not limited to the conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils (Ismail, 1985, 2005; Uyangoda, 2005, 2007, 2010). The systematic attacks on Muslims by the majority Sinhalese in the East, South, and Central Lanka since 2010 show that ethnic conflict is an ongoing problem in the country. Only this time around, a different ethnic minority is the focus of attacks (Haniffa, 2016; Haniffa et al., 2014; Imtiyaz, 2020; Imtiyaz & Mohamed-Saleem, 2015; Sarjoon et al., 2016). Tamil-speaking Christian communities are feeling increasingly threatened and violated in the 21st century (Bauman & Ponniah, 2017).

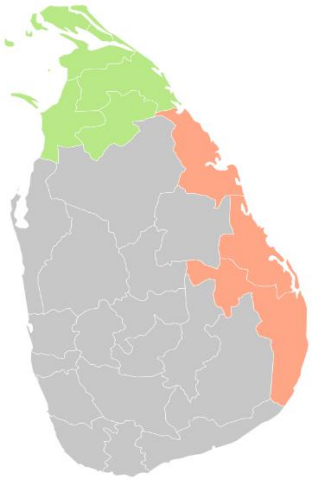
The state apparatus, including the police and the emergency task force, continue to ignore these conflicts (Haniffa, 2016), as they have done in the case of all violence against minority ethnic communities in the past. Minority communities cannot rely on the state's protection when they are being attacked. The severity of these deeply rooted ethnic conflicts can only be lessened by examining the older conflicts informing clashes in the post-war context (Aliff, 2015; Kadirgamar, 2013; Sivanesan, 2020). The lack of state-driven intervention programmes to promote peace and coexistence in this war-torn country is a result of power asymmetries between ethnicities (Höglund & Orjuela, 2011). For instance, the lack of efforts towards demilitarisation and mechanisms for better power-sharing between ethnicities have done little to eliminate the precarity of everyday lives (Fernando, 2017), especially in the more vulnerable communities of ethnic groups (Orjuela et al., 2016). The assumed state of peace does not extend to the state allowing victims to seek justice and reparation for their losses.

In December 2004, a devastating natural disaster further exacerbated suffering related to ethnic conflicts. The Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami wreaked havoc on an already burdened country. While Lanka had experienced natural catastrophes in the past, never before had the country experienced devastation on the scale of the 2004 tsunami, which claimed more lives in the North and the East of the country, the areas most afflicted by war and most neglected by the state, than in any other regions (McGilvray, 2008). The narratives explored in my thesis are those of people who live in a region that was a focal point of ethnic war for 30 years and the site of the worst devastation caused by the 2004 tsunami.

Figure 1: Map of Lanka

Source: https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/sri-lanka

Figure 2: Northern and Eastern regions highlighted



Source: https://www.srilankacampaign.org/ethical-tourism/traveller-handbook/

Table 1: The population of the North and the East of Lanka

The North	Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya districts	A total population of 1,061,315 (5.21% of the population of the country)
The East	Ampara, Batticaloa, and Trincomalee districts	A total population of 1,555,510 (7.64% of the population of the country)
Ethnic minorities comprise over 75% of the population of the North and the East, and they mostly speak the Tamil language		
Over 70% of Lankan Tamils live in the North and the East		

Note. From *Census of Population and Housing 2012*, by Department of Census and Statistics, 2012, http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/Pages/Activities/Reports/CPH_2012_5Per_Rpt.pdf

To gain insight into contemporary socio-political complexities in Lanka, the rest of this chapter provides an account of ethnic conflict following independence and how it perpetrated structural violence that continues significantly marginalises the country's ethnic minorities.

1.2 UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE PERPETUATED BY INTERSECTIONAL MARGINALISATION

This section follows a few trajectories to understand violence in Lankan societies. Firstly, it historically locates the structural violence of the state that systematically oppresses

people from specific backgrounds. Secondly, it examines the violence within and between communities in the post-war context of Northern Lanka. While acknowledging that structural violence is not the only form of oppression, this section offers insights on how the modern state's strategic segregations – that is, the divide and conquer strategy of the former colonial rulers – reproduce intersectional marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1991) that continues to oppress particular sections of society.

1.2.1 STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

In the wake of independence, a political battle between Sinhalese and Tamils emerged in the mid-20th century. Despite their political representation, Tamils in positions of power at that point of time were no match for the overwhelming response by the majority Sinhalese and their political leadership. Political negotiations resulted only in heightened mistrust, missed opportunities, and antagonisms (de Mel et al., 2012; S. Perera, 2001). Unfortunately, instead of ensuring equal rights for all and developing a state mechanism to share power in the absence of the colonial rule, politicians damaged ethnic relations by conferring on the Sinhala-speaking majority the constitutional power to rule the country from that point onwards (Uyangoda, 2015; Wilson, 1979).

Paul Brass (2003), through his study of the Hindu-Muslim violence in India over more than three decades, offers two analytical frameworks to understand structural violence. In the first, violence emerges within a community where social relationships and circumstances are often determined by religion, which has been the primary source of violence and conflict since India gained independence from the British in 1947. In the second, violence emerges from the political leadership deeply rooted in the power of the Hindu religion and its symbols (Brass, 2003). The nature of communal violence reveals the extent of involvement and/or non-involvement of state personnel responsible for ensuring the rule of law in the country (Brass, 2003). For instance, during the outbreaks of communal violence – like the destruction of Ayodha Mosque in Gujarat in 2002 – the police and the military did nothing as they witnessed extreme forms of violence against the Muslims unfolding. Such acts of brutal violence against a religious minority are systematically planned and carried out with the support of those in political power.

I use Brass's (2003) framing of structural violence to show that the experiences of ethnic minorities in Lanka have been systematically reduced and violated by the Sinhala

Buddhist nationalist discourse. In addition, the feminist scholarship I draw on throughout in this section helps to unpack the interlocking aspects of structural violence.

The implications of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist response at the time of independence from colonial rule significantly impacted citizens of the other ethnicities, languages, and religions of the country. Theravada Buddhism became the supreme religion, and Sinhala became the official language of the government. The English- and Tamil-speaking population of the country had limited access to state benefits, including employment opportunities. Minority communities suffered immense limitations in terms of access to education, land, and other resources. The standardisation of education policy in 1974 discriminated against Tamils and other minorities by favouring the admission of Sinhala-speaking students to state university education. Additionally, alterations to socio-economic policies financially benefited the Sinhala-speaking population of the country (DeVotta, 2007; de Mel et al., 2012; Sriskandarajah, 2005).

The ruling class conflated ethnicity, language, and religion into social identities/groups that were allocated different social standings (de Mel et al., 2012). While such social delineations were rooted in the colonial past, they were further exploited by the ruling class after independence. Social markers (e.g., ethnicity, language, religion) marked and organised ethnic groups into a social and economic hierarchy; those at the bottom were commonly Tamil-speaking Muslims. Ethnic differences based on language and religion further intensified hatred among the two major ethnicities. Ethnic solidarity during the anti-colonial struggles against British rule to reinstate the indigenous languages of Sinhala and Tamil was transformed into linguistic ethnonationalism, recalling the domination of Tamils under colonial rule (DeVotta, 2004; de Mel et al., 2012).

Like the 1974 standardisation of education policy, such policies undermined the rights of Tamils and extended the alienation experienced by the Tamil population, which slowly pushed them to the North and the East of the country (de Mel et al., 2012; Sabaratnam, 1987). The anti-Tamil riots caused by Sinhala mobs in 1958, 1977, and 1983, and the state's indirect involvement in these riots, pushed them even further (S. J. Tambiah, 1986). The Indian Tamils brought as slaves by the British had been displaced to the North, only to be marginalised by other Northern Tamils. They did not have access to land or housing and could only work as day labourers due to lack of access to education. Most importantly, they were discriminated against because of their caste (Bass, 2012; Wickramasinghe, 2009).

These events left little room for any minority community to trust the government or other communities that profoundly 'othered' them in their day-to-day lives. Despite Tamil

becoming the second official national language in 1987, the implementation of this amendment to the constitution is far from becoming a reality in many parts of the country, including the Tamil-dominated North and East (de Mel et al., 2012). This declaration did not bring any meaningful structural changes. For example, all state communications like circulars and notifications are issued in Sinhala first, and the translations into Tamil and English take a while to follow. Legislation is passed in Sinhala only, and the Tamil and English translations bear a special clause that states, "In the event of any inconsistency between the Sinhala and Tamil texts of this Act the Sinhala text shall prevail" (Foreign Exchange Act, No. 12 of 2017). Hardly any state policies work towards elevating Tamils' material, economic and social status. For instance, most police stations in the North and the East do not have Tamil-speaking officers (Shadow Report, Women and Media Collective, 2010 & 2017). Due to the fear of being violated by the state apparatus, including the police, ethnic minorities are unlikely to seek the 'help' of law enforcement or report a crime. Instead of gaining the trust of ethnic minority communities, the national leadership, with the support of Buddhist monks, continues to be dominated by Sinhala Buddhist nationalist values and norms (Bauman & Ponniah, 2017; Herath, 2015).

Ethnic division is only one form of exclusion in Lanka. The following section elaborates on social exclusion categories other than ethnicity, and shows how they are all deeply intertwined with one another.

1.2.2 VIOLENCE WITHIN AND BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

Oppression based on ethnicity, gender, class, caste, sexuality, mental health, and disability has been part of the Lankan history for a very long time. In the context of post-war Lanka, people navigate the complexities created by the intersections of these oppressions (Sivamohan, 2016; Thiranagama, 2011; Weerawardhana, 2017a–d, 2018). Every act of marginalisation, especially in the North and the East, is a product of multiple forms of oppression that are historically intertwined and include colonisation. This section provides some insights into the complex realities of everyday life on the margins.

A plethora of analysis exists on how ethnic war, conflict, and natural disasters make women and girls more vulnerable to violence, compromised mobility, and non-participation in Lanka's socio-political and economic landscapes. The literature reveals the increased burdens upon women to play multiple roles in adverse conditions to protect their families (Ariyabandu, 2006; de Alwis, 2002, 2012; de Mel, 2007; de Mel et al., 2009; Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003,

2004; Kodikara, 2012; Perera-Mubarak, 2013; Ruwanpura, 2008, 2009; Saroor, 2014). The West often lauds economic independence as an essential starting point for women's empowerment and a pathway out of poverty. The complexities of subaltern contexts from the Global South often cannot be understood through these lenses. I use the concept of subaltern here to mean those who are marginalised within a marginalised community. In other words, subaltern experiences help to understand that interlocking intersectional aspects of marginalisation (Combahee River Collective, 1979). For instance, Gayatri Spivak (1988) points out that the Global South is the West's Other and subalterns are the Global South's Other. I discuss this in more detail in subsequent sections. When women become the breadwinners of their families, they continue to be marginalised by society's socio-cultural structures, which means they never become the heads of households in census records, always rely on the male members to have access to their earnings, and never get property titles in their own names.

Economic independence seldom transforms other aspects of Lankan women's lives. For example, they continue to do the household chores while male members of the household and family maintain decision-making power (Ruwanpura, 2008). Access to an income has also put the lives of many women in danger, including sexual violence perpetrated by their family members. The literature also argues that research must take into account the experiences of women and girls (Abeysekera, 2002, 2012; Harris, 2004; Jayachandra, 2010). The complexity of their experiences mounts as they intersect with other forms of oppression, such as caste, class, disability, and sexuality (Jayachandra, 2010). An examination of daily living conditions for women and their life trajectories must consider embedded gendered norms and values, which are instituted throughout society. For example, the state's administrative practices, including the implementation of state policies – everything from the selection of beneficiaries and the allocation of funds to corrupted procedures including sexual bribery – are hugely gendered (Centre for Equality and Justice [CEJ], 2018a–c; Jayachandra, 2010).

1.2.2.1 Reproductive Rights and Violence against Women and Girls

Despite the ongoing struggle to make it the woman's choice (Abeysekera, 2010), abortion, even in case of rape, is illegal under sections of 303–307 of the Lankan Penal Code. According to a proposal to the law commission to provide for the medical termination of pregnancy in cases of rape and severe foetal damage in 2013, abortion is allowed only to save the woman's life under extreme medical complications. Within such a rigid legal framework,

women, girls and some transmen undergo unsafe abortions to eliminate unwanted pregnancies (Wickramagamage, 2004).

According to media reports, in 2018 about 1,000 such abortions happened every day across the country (‘Shocking, Shameful’, 2018). Women and girls are subjected to severe harm (health complications and abuse) due to unsafe abortion practices. About 10% die as a result of the procedure. The family planning association of Lanka has been closely working with women’s groups to decriminalise abortion in the country. Due to legal and socio-cultural tabooing of this topic combined with the state’s refusal to protect reproductive rights of women, any advocacy initiative takes time (‘A Collection of Writing on Right to Safe Abortion’, 2018; Kumarage, 2019). Most importantly, the country suffers from a scarcity of knowledge/information on abortion-related issues (Abeysekera, 2010; Wijesiriwardena et al., 2020). Institutions such as the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka (n.d.) and activists have kept discussion on the Bill amending the law related to abortion in Lanka alive. Advocacy initiatives and activist research papers have been produced from time to time (see, e.g., International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2019).

Divisions based on ethnicity, class, caste, and religion play a vital role when responding (or not) to instances of violence against women and girls (Abeysekera, 2002; CEJ, 2018; Kodikara, 2012; Jayawardena & Pinto-Jayawardena, 2016; Y. Tambiah, 2005). The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act was introduced only in 2005 after a very long advocacy battle carried out by various women’s groups to show and validate the socio-cultural and psychological impacts of domestic violence in Lankan communities. Many women’s groups and organisations are still advocating for the proper implementation of this Act (Kodikara, 2012; Saroor, 2014). However, the government has displayed no interest in doing so. This is no doubt partly because in most cases of violence against women and girls, family and community members are the perpetrators (Fisher, 2010; Fonseka et al., 2015; Gowrinathan, 2016; Jayasuriya et al., 2011; Kodikara, 2012).

Sivamohan (2016, p. 378) argues that due to ethnicised and gendered nationalism, “militarism perpetrated sexual violation as a means of conquest”. Therefore, rape and sexual violence committed by the military or the ethnic ‘other’ gets more public and media attention as opposed to similar violence committed by men and boys from the same community as the victims. For example, the rape case of Krishanthy Kumaraswamy generated a strong wave of response among activists, academics, and media (de Mel, 2007; Matthews, 2009; Sivamohan, 2016; Sriskanthadas, 2016). Ms Kumaraswamy was an 18-year-old Tamil schoolgirl who was

gang-raped and murdered by six Lankan Army soldiers in 1996 in Jaffna (Northern Lanka). It was a sensational case in popular media. Many human rights institutions and researchers in Lanka tried to use this case to hold the government of Lanka accountable. Unlike many other similar cases that are silenced due to systemic social, cultural and political structures of domination, this one made it to the courts (Sivamohan, 2016). Eventually, a three-member bench trial at bar found the soldiers guilty and sentenced them to death (Loken et al., 2018). Sivamohan (2016) argues that this case is yet another reminder to an ethnically divided nation that the judiciary has primarily been constructed on ideas of punishment and not prevention, thereby reasserting nationalistic claims (Sivamohan, 2016).

Given the social and cultural fabrics of communities (e.g., the social stigma of no more being an eligible commodity on the marriage market) and heightened tensions between ethnicities (the fear of over-policing and repeated victimisation), issues of violence against women and girls are silenced (Minority Rights Group International, 2013). Often, the socio-cultural and legal aspects of justice are deliberately separated from one another. The tragedy of a young girl named Vidya Sivaloganathan shows how everyday sexual violence against women and girls has been normalised in the post-war context (Jayawardena & Pinto-Jayawardena, 2016). In 2015, in the Northern Province, Vidya was abducted while she was on her way to school and then brutally raped and murdered by a group of men from the same ethnicity. It took more than two years before a verdict was reached at the end of 2017 (Willarachchi, 2017). Women's groups from across the country supported justice for Vidya. However, Vidya's mother was socially ostracised by her community. For instance, she could no longer participate in any social and cultural events without the scrutiny and judgement of her motherhood by others. While grieving for the loss of her only daughter, Vidya's mother was subjected to victim blaming. She was repeatedly asked to defend her daughter's character and social conduct, manage the patriarchs of the family, keep the family together, and simultaneously fight for justice for her daughter (Butt et al., 2019; Jayawardena & Pinto-Jayawardena, 2016). The aftermath of Vidya's tragic death is an example of how stigma plays out at the level of the community, creating multiple burdens.

1.2.2.2 LAND ISSUES

The complex nature of ethnic, gender, religion, and caste oppressions that have given rise to embedded patterns of land ownership repeatedly results in the primary custodians of the land being ousted. Moreover, the militarisation of lands is a growing concern in the context of post-war Northern Lanka, leading to profoundly compromised land ownership, access, and

control. A report on land issues in the North published by the Maatram Foundation (an organisation based in Vavuniya, an administrative district of Northern Province) in 2015 reveals that multifaceted complications arise when gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, and abled and disabled bodies intersect in land disputes (Maatram Foundation, 2015). For instance, minority ex-combatants are vulnerable in the hands of state military due to continuous surveillance of their movements (Fernando, 2017). Another layer of suffering is added if they have disabilities. A female ex-combatant with disabilities from an oppressed caste and class who is living in a rural part of the North is likely to suffer the most (Azmi, 2015; Martin, 2017).

1.2.2.3 DISABILITY

Issues of disability have entered national discussion only in the past decade in Lanka. Studies show that there has been an increase in disabilities due to the protracted violent conflict and that building capacity for persons with a disability in the post-war context is essential through research interventions to understand the issues they face (Campbell, 2009; Mendis, 2004; Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 2013). There are state-driven intervention programmes for persons with a disability that focus on ex-soldiers, such as the Ranaviru Sewa Authority established in 2000, and provide material and psychosocial support (de Mel, 2016; De Zoysa & Wickrama, 2011). However, ex-LTTE combatants with disabilities from the North and the East of the country are not supported by this intervention programme.

Numerous civilians suffered wounds during the decades of ethnic war, and indeed during the 2004 tsunami, but they are usually left out of the dominant discourse around disability. For instance, the everyday reality of women with a disability is that they must navigate inappropriate social interactions such as undesired sympathy or insensitive curiosity (Kandasamy et al., 2017; Samararatne & Soldatic, 2019; Y. Tambiah, 2005). They are subjected to various kinds of sexual harassment, including sexual bribery (CEJ, 2018). However, some of them choose to be not only self-advocates but also social advocates who try to make the lives of persons with disability better (Saroor, 2014). The silence around disabled segments of the population has led to an emergence of disabled activists who are determined to address the issues they experience and advocate for their rights.

1.2.2.4 CASTE ISSUES

Immediately after independence from the colonial rule in 1948, the distribution of power among Lanka's ethnicities became a threat, especially to the Sinhala-speaking majority

of the country. As touched on above, Tamils had more access to education during the British colonial administration. This meant they had more opportunities to be employed and came to dominate administrative jobs in the colony. However, within the generalised category of Tamils existed an unequal distribution of power and other forms of oppression (de Mel et al., 2012). Tamils from a particular caste, class, religion, and geographical location dominated the socio-political space. For example, Tamils from privileged caste and class backgrounds such as the landowning (and ownership of agricultural produce) Vellalar castes had access to education in English, which increased their mobility and opportunities to occupy state jobs under British rule (Arasaratnam, 1981). They also had access to better housing facilities. Most of their domestic help workers came from Sinhala and under-privileged Tamil and Tamil-speaking communities (Bass, 2012; Sabaratnam, 1987). They continued to enjoy their privileges under colonisation while a large group of Tamils who did not belong to these privileged castes and other ethnicities suffered (de Mel et al., 2012).

N. Saravanan's *Dalitin Kurippuhal* ('Journal of a Dalit', 2018) describes the oppression of his caste, the Arunthathiyinar, the most discriminated against caste in Lanka. In a transcendent work of activist scholarship, Saravanan offers profound insights based on the experiences of his community, starting with the history of the enslavement of the Arunthathiyinar during the colonial era, their enforced relocation to Lanka, and their ever-deteriorating everyday existence since then. He examines the shame and guilt associated with the identity of the Arunthathiyinar which have been fuelling the social and political silencing of the community for centuries, the intersectional challenges of finding a voice, and the politics of representation of oppressed identities. Saravanan's distinguished contribution also points out the lack of critical scholarship that challenges the hegemonic discourses around caste issues in Lanka and the profoundly problematic intersections with other forms of marginalisation that make certain sections of the Arunthathiyinar more vulnerable than others based on gender, sexuality, variations within the hierarchy of the caste system (especially those in Northern Lanka), the geographical location of their bearings in Lanka, and access to support structures (Saravanan, 2018).

1.2.2.5 SEXUALITY

The monolithic nature of Tamilness and the fight for the rights of Tamils of Lanka promoted by the LTTE and its sympathisers did not allow room on the stage for any other form of oppression (Thiranagama, 2011). They feared that the importance of their fight would be

lost if Tamils themselves fought for sexual, gender, and caste liberations, which would lead to debilitating in-fighting. The only exception, to some extent, has been women's rights activism, which, however, did not expand beyond the narrative of the gender binary. Gendered controls of sexuality followed a rigid understanding of nationhood (Sivamohan, 2016). Hence, only now are the stories and struggles of LGBTIQA+[4] community slowly emerging in the North and the East of the country. This thesis is one of the first to study the activism of these 'marginalised of the marginalised'.

According to a report recently published by the CEJ (2018, p. 11), "The Constitutional protection against non-discrimination does not include the categories of gender identity or sexual orientation." Sections 365 and 365A of the Penal Code on carnal intercourse and gross indecency discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex communities of the country (Arteta, 2019; Ellawala, 2018; Kuru-Utumpala, 2013; Miller, 2002; Nichols, 2014; Wijewardene, 2007). Same-sex relationships and sex work in brothels or confined spaces are a criminal offence in the eyes of the Penal Code. In 1995, an attempt to decriminalise same-sex relationships during Penal Code reforms made the language used gender-neutral by replacing the word 'male' with 'person', thereby criminalising consensual sex between women as well (Women and Media Collective & Outright Action International, 2018). In 2017, the proposal to repeal sections 365 and 365A was blocked by the president of the country, not for the first time (Wipulasena, 2018).

Despite ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1981 (CEDAW), all genders and sexual orientations are not equal according to the Constitution of Lanka (Fernando et al., 2018; Women and Media Collective, 2017). Once every four years, the government submits a report to the CEDAW Committee on the progress it has made. However, women's groups challenge this report by providing their own 'Shadow Report' on the actual status of women and girls to the same committee.

A 2017 mapping study conducted by Colombo-based LGBTIQ rights organisation Equal Ground revealed that around 10% of the Lankan population identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Brown, 2017). The study acknowledges that national statistics on the LGBT community cannot be obtained due to an environment of prevailing stigma and discrimination. The study covered three districts in the South, including Colombo, and one

[4] There are several different abbreviations used to address this community. I maintain the ones used by the sources cited in this thesis.

from the Central Province. It shows that 19.6% of the population above the age of 18 in these four districts identifies as LGBT. Based on the findings of the study, the director of Equal Ground lists the following statistics on violations faced by LGBT persons, including by immediate family members:

> Respondents faced challenges and barriers within the last two years and most stated that this was because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression. Some respondents did not disclose whether their sexual orientation and/or gender identity was a factor. More than 70% of the respondents were forced to behave or engage in activities against their wishes; 46.7% faced police harassment; 64.8% were discriminated by friends; 64.5% were physically or verbally abused in public spaces; 72.2% were refused education; 57.14% had their employment terminated; 70% were refused medical assistance; 60% were refused participation in religious practices or events and 41.7% were refused education because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The data revealed that a significant number of the LGBT respondents faced rejection, violence and harassment because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression (Brown, 2017, p. 23)

The available literature, predominantly from the South, illustrates socio-cultural and legal discrimination against homosexuality and socio-cultural, legal, and medical exclusions of sex workers and transgender persons in the country (Ellawala, 2018; Miller, 2002; Nichols, 2014; Thangarajah, 2013; Samaraweera & Samarasinghe, 2016). Heterosexuality exercises supreme authority and dismisses any other sexualities by projecting itself as the only acceptable human sexuality – which gets validated by patriarchal social constructions such as allowing sexual relationships only under the institution of marriage (Ellawala, 2018; Kuru-Utumpala, 2013; Samaraweera & Samarasinghe, 2016). Studies also point out that the social and legal exclusion of sexualities and sexual identities is significantly under-researched in Lanka (Ellawala, 2018; Jayarathne, 2017; Kuru-Utumpala, 2013).

Under the leadership of a government that is influenced by extreme Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups, sexual freedom and liberation remain criminalised. Strict surveillance of LGBTIQ rights activists, homophobic media reporting, and attacks on social media have resulted in minimal public discussion on sexual orientations and gender identities beyond the binary (Arteta, 2019; Jayarathne, 2017; Kuru-Utumpala, 2013). However, since the early 1990s, the LGBTIQ movement has been active, predominantly in Colombo, the capital (Arteta, 2019).

Due to socio-economic stigmas and cultural invalidations, many in the North and the East of the country remain closeted. This reality is slowly changing in the post-war context, however. For instance, the social organising of LGBTIQ communities often takes place in the shadows. The mapping study conducted by Equal Ground (Brown, 2017) revealed that access

to resources and better financial opportunities would help the LGBTIQ community come out of the closet. Often, close liaisons with women's groups provide amplify their voices and help advocate for change. Scholarly reflections on this new development are yet to evolve, and this thesis contributes to filling this gap in the knowledge.

2

EXPLORING SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN POST-WAR LANKA

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE I

Like girls from infidel families, we went to school, and stayed there even after we had become “big.” And still more like them, but so unlike our mothers, some of us longed for more learning and dreamed about leaving home to get it. The elders shook their heads and cautioned: too much education could ruin a girl’s future. (Azad, 2020, prologue)

2.1 WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AS THE PILLAR OF RESISTANCE AND SURVIVAL

Women's activism is one of the main pillars of resistance against different forms of oppression in Lanka (Jayawardena & Pinto-Jayawardena, 2016; Kodikara & Emmanuel, 2016; Saroor, 2014; Sivamohan, 2016; Wijesiriwardena et al., 2020). Based on the experiences of activism on the margins, and boldly challenging hierarchies at various levels across several issues, I propose to use the term 'women's activism' to represent a wide variety of bodies that are out there on the frontline fighting different battles every day. Women address multiple forms of structural and communal violence against them on multiple levels, such as the family, the community, and the state. Women's activism provides the platform for many different voices and experiences to be heard and to fight for their rights and the liberation of their communities. They come from specific combinations of class, caste, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and religion, which substantiates their claims as subaltern voices (Spivak, 1988), with dignity and agency.

The literature on women's activism in Lanka documents not just a history of war, violence, and conflict, but also the stories of those, individually and/or collectively, who were and are committed to profound social and legal changes despite many hurdles, including threats to their lives (Abeysekera, 1999, 2003; Jayawardena & Pinto-Jayawardena, 2016; Nesiah, 2012; Samuel, 2006; Saroor, 2014; Vithanagama, 2018). During the decades of ethnic war, feminist peace activism played a vital role in defining women's activism in the country (Bandarage, 2010; de Alwis, 2008, 2009; Samuel, 2006). Simultaneously, women's activism has also focused on exposing different forms of violence against women and girls (Fisher, 2009; Hewamanne, 2009; Kodikara, 2018; Kodikara & Emmanuel, 2016; Pinnewala, 2009; Saroor, 2014) and how militarisation of the North and the East of the country made women and girls more vulnerable (de Mel, 2007, 2009; Y. Tambiah, 2005).

The late queer feminist activist scholar and advocate Priya Thangarajah (2014, p. 67) argues that a collective feminist consciousness drives the desire to document women's activism in Lanka with the purpose of challenging mainstream narratives and storytelling focused on linear, singular, and uncritical histories that often ignore the marginalised:

> The determination to document women's activism in the North and East stemmed from our collective feminist obsession with documentation that is placed within the larger context of the erasure of multiple stories and histories within mainstream story-telling which is a deliberate act in creating a linear singular narrative in Sri Lanka.

Sumathy Sivamohan (2016) points out that analytical lenses have been preoccupied with nationalisms, the nation-state, and ethno-political conflict, which has resulted in lack of

scholarship that critically examines the textures and contours of the Tamil polity. She argues that the history of nationhood and violence cannot be examined without including the narratives and experiences of victimisation of hundreds of women in the North, both Tamil and Muslim (Sivamohan, 2016).

Sivamohan (2016) argues that communities as discursive entities occupying the claimed and the unclaimed territories of the modern state must be taken into account in order to understand discourses on nationhood. Similarly, she proposes to understand the political existence of women through the frameworks of nationhood by studying its tenets such as territorialisation and hegemonic imperatives. She challenges the ethno-nationalist and separatist formations of liberation and shallow articulations of women's agency and celebrations of the same. According to Sivamohan (2016), hegemonic narrations of women's agency allow little space to understand women's experiences with violence and resistance outside of nationalism and nationalist discourses.

The history of Lankan women's activism as illustrated in this chapter also shows that it is not limited by the nationalist and liberatory narratives and interpretations. Women's experiences with coercion and violence have often been articulated through defiance and resistance (Sivamohan, 2016). Hence, I use Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectional marginalisation to understand the nuances present in the case of Lanka.

Women's responses to intersectional marginalisation help to tease out the details. The various types of violence that women experience at homes, communities, and in the hands of state bodies has created multiple platforms to advocate for their rights. The ongoing resistance to all forms of oppression provides a critical voice that shapes how activism is understood in a complex context of historical violence. As illustrated in the introduction to Part I of this thesis, these experiences are shaped by various intersecting aspects of marginalisation, which are comprised of context-specific histories of colonialism and structural violence. The literature shows that the activist consciousness that I intend to explore is often produced as a response to these by the subaltern. The context of the Global South, I argue, is defined by particular experiences of subalternity emerging in the post-war context of Northern Lanka.

Studying the experiences of women's activism in the post-Indian Ocean tsunami context in Lanka, scholars point out the importance of coalition work amongst women's organisations, who prioritised the task of increasing women's participation in decision-making bodies during the reconstruction process. Simultaneously, they had to respond to the calls of violence against women – even inside makeshift camps and temporary shelters (de Mel et al., 2009; Divakalala, 2007; Ruwanpura, 2009).

In a collection of essays edited by the activist Shreen Saroor titled *Our Struggles, Our Stories* (2014), feminist and women's rights activists from the North and the East of the country provide insights on different issues addressed by women's activism, such as land struggles, enabling disabled women to have access to services and resources, the search for the missing persons, violence against women, religious and cultural oppression of women and girls, and issues faced by women ex-combatants. The volume describes day-to-day aspects of women's activism and the experiences of women's resistance in different realities of complex and intertwined contexts. The feminist research methodologies applied in this collection capture stories of women's agency that are focused on creating more platforms for such stories to be heard (Divakalala, 2005, 2014). Finally, it points out the need to document and celebrate lives and struggles with a profound sense of historical and contextual understandings. Researcher and activist Mirak Raheem (2014, pp. 6–7) notes in his foreword to this edited volume that

> while there are publications that attempt to provide histories of feminist and other civil society activist movements, movements and personalities, they are for the most part written by scholars, both from Sri Lanka and outside, some of whom straddle the worlds of academic and activism. There are but a handful of publications that attempt to tell the story from the 'inside' that seek to provide a narrative of events, explanations and motivations. These few publications perform an important function of providing a history in context, which can not only increase understanding and debate but also of celebrating lives and institutions that may have been forgotten.

Often, liberal ideologies from the Global North – the West, in particular – influence the feminist discourses. A renowned feminist scholar from Lanka, Kumari Jayawardena (2009), traces the history of active feminism and movements dedicated to women's liberation in 11 countries from Asia and the Middle East. She argues that the little-known histories of various women's movements in the 19th century need to be incorporated into the feminist histories of the Global South. With the support of the empirical evidence, she argues that those who want to keep the women of their societies in these countries subordinated, oppressed, and exploited by patriarchal structures conveniently dismiss feminism as a foreign ideology. Struggles for women's liberation and national liberation movements have been part of the national histories of these countries for centuries. She points out that the histories depicted in school textbooks on national-revolutionary and democratic movements do not give adequate attention to women's participation in these movements. Nor are there many mentions of women's movements for liberation (Jayawardena, 1972, 1984, 2009).

2.1.1 WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN THE CONTEXT OF MILITARISATION

The body of feminist scholarship from Lanka addresses a range of issues within the context of the ethnic war and the internal ethnic conflicts/tensions in the country. While the women who lived remarkable lives in times of war were one aspect of the country's feminist history, other activists also made contributions, both locally and nationally. For example, in *A Hidden History* (2006), feminist scholar Kumudini Samuel provides an analysis of the nature of women's activism for peace in Lanka.

Women's agency has largely been articulated through examples of women's militancy and women's activism that questions particular type of violence against women (de Mel, 2007; Emmanuel, 2006; Thiranagama, 2011). Militancy was a tool used by women (and men) to avoid the traditional gendered roles expected of them (Thiranagama, 2011). Internal conflicts and civil wars across the world have generated academic and activist interest in understanding the local contexts as significantly shaped by these conflicts. The toll that these conflicts have had on generations of people is mostly approached through political, social, and economic factors. Conflict relating to gender relations is mostly understood as an overlapping concern in most of the existing literature (Abeysekera, 2003).

In her book *Dealing with Women's Militancy: An Analysis of Feminist Discourses from Sri Lanka,* Sarala Emmanuel (2006) argues that the pre-existing analytical tools mostly adopted to access gendered consequences of violence and conflict in the West cannot be replicated when analysing the situation in Lanka, especially from a women's agency perspective. By juxtaposing conflictual feminist articulation, Emmanuel points out the problematic nature of the analytical categories within feminist scholarship. For instance, she draws on the work of Jacklyn Cock to show the division within feminist understandings of militarism:

> Cock (1992) recognises the fundamental split within feminist discourses on militarism as being between the liberal feminists who argue for women's entry into militaries, and radical feminists who argue that violence is antagonistic to feminism as an ideology (referring to the essential nurturing qualities of women). (Emmanuel, 2006, p. 28)

Emmanuel explores the tension between the two kinds of feminism when approaching and understanding women's role in militancy and its consequences. She also points out feminist conceptualisations that focus on understanding the process of militarisation as a nexus between nationalism, militarism, and patriarchy (Emmanuel, 2006).

Emmanuel (2006) also examines women's engagement with violent political movements in South Asia to challenge the conventional global discourses on women's militancy: "The idea that violence can be integrated with *feminine* identities in the context of

non-Western (in this case South Asian Hindu) culture and myth become important for understanding the construction of the gendered identity of women who commit violence." Hence, she argues that women's agency in the South Asian feminist discourse is framed in both direct and indirect ways, with the indirect ways addressing the visibility of women's activism within traditional patriarchal militant structures that challenge traditional gendered structures. With the help of examples from Lanka, she emphasises the need to recognise the fluidity of the women's movement between multiple roles, spaces, and identities, and beyond the limitations of out-of-context framings and understandings of feminism (Emmanuel, 2006, pp. 43–47).

The feminist scholar Neloufer de Mel (2007) provides an in-depth cultural analysis of consequences of violence in Lankan societies. She expands understandings of militarisation beyond its institutionalisation in a way that is deeply gendered and functions as bringing significant transformations within and between societies. She draws on the work of Kumudini Samuel (2006) – whom we saw above tracing the hidden history of women's activism for peace in Lanka – to support her claim that women's activism provides the platform for creating a civic space where the question of "how and why a distinct discourse on women in war became normed in a manner that privileged certain experiences of women survivors" (de Mel, 2007, p. 272). She further states that the kind of questioning around women's activism should not only focus on women's experiences per se but also be attentive to the creation of narratives based on specific subjectivities produced through dominant forms of knowledge production:

> To dwell on this is to ask questions about how the 'subject-effect' of Lankan women affected by war is achieved within feminist discourse. What is the dominant thought and vocabulary that encases it? What is included and excluded in its production? How does it circulate? And while this requires the mapping of a certain chronology of thought and practice, I hope to do this without recourse to a simple linear effect, drawing attention instead to multiple genealogies located within both global and local feminist practice. (de Mel, 2007, p. 272)

The insights de Mel (2007) offers on feminist activism in her analysis are connected to those of other feminist scholars inside and outside of Lanka. As noted by Samuel (2006), the promise of what the human rights discourse offers has brought a shift in feminist activism where the earlier activism based on revolutionary struggles was replaced by advocacy for legal and policy reform by the 1990s. De Mel (2007, p. 289) states, "A rights doctrine inspired Sri Lankan feminist groups to invest energy into shaping legal mechanisms such as the Women's Charter, a domestic violence Bill and a draft women's rights Bill." Consequently, she argues, with Mohanty (2003), that such engagements in feminist activism have continued beyond the law and legal implications, with such feminist labour enhancing the understanding of constituted

gendered identities, negotiations, and building solidarity and networks. De Mel also argues that South Asian feminists have consistently refused the replacement of the state with free-market neoliberalism, understanding that the "state is the largest agency with the capacity to effect significant social, economic, and political change" (de Mel, 2007, p. 290).

2.2 THE FIGHT AGAINST GENDERED LEGISLATION

The 1978 Constitution of the Lankan state facilitates discriminatory policies and practices. Article 16 (1) states that all written and unwritten laws that existed prior to the Constitution are 'valid and operative' even if they are 'inconsistent' with fundamental rights granted to all citizens (Parliament of Sri Lanka, n.d.). This creates a situation where discriminatory laws in terms of land titles, religion, language, access to education, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, access to employment opportunities and economic ventures, and access to state-controlled services continue to be ethnicised, gendered, and marginalising. The social implications of Article 16 are particularly evident in customary laws that apply to Muslims, Sinhalese, and Tamils. The minimum age of marriage is 18 for Lankans. However, under Section 23 of the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA), a girl can be given in marriage at any age (Razi, 2019). According to Kandyan law (applies to Kandyan Buddhists) and Thesawalamai customary laws (apply to Northern Tamils), women are discriminated against when receiving property as widows and when it comes to transferring property, respectively, which oftentimes supersedes constitutional laws.

In the post-war context, women's activism continues to successfully articulate multifaceted notions of justice and constitutional reforms. The Muslim Personal Law Reforms Action Group, led by a group of women activists, activist researchers, and advocates, was formed to address gender-based injustices in Muslim customary law and to reform it to enhance the rights of women and girls (Isadeen & Hamin, 2016). One of their main efforts is to stop the child marriages that are legal under the MMDA. Women's groups have also been key actors in the process of enhancing the concept of fundamental rights in the post-war context, based on the kinds of violation of human rights that the country has witnessed since independence. Various submissions to government reform committees have been made promoting the rights of everyone across ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual identities and expressions, sexualities, caste, mental health, class, disability, and religion ('Call for Solidarity with the Activists', 2016; 'Celebrating Pride', 2018; Women and Media Collective, n.d.).

As a queer feminist activist on the cusp of the centre(s) and periphery(ies) of activism in Lanka for over a couple of decades, I have experienced that the realities of women's activism are continually evolving in both localities. The activism of the centre has been documented more than that of the latter for various reasons, including political will and methodological restrictions due to the ethnic war (Saroor, 2014). Women's activism in socio-political, geographical, and ideological peripheries is beginning to articulate and redefine understandings of socio-political activism using self-critique and by posing pressing questions to other movements (Walker, 2012). For example, there is a growing concern that feminist or women's movements cannot advocate for the protection of women's rights without addressing issues around women's sexuality, disability, and caste-based oppression. Addressing the bitter legacies of difference has the potential to become a pivotal analytical category of socio-political activism in the Global South.

Moreover, there seems to be increased awareness of the everyday challenges of lives that have been significantly altered by the intersections of different forms of oppression. Academic research is yet to document and reflect upon this recent development (Saroor, 2014; Walker, 2012). This process is a substantial development in the history of women's activism and how political spheres are negotiated and utilised in Lanka. This thesis builds on critical insights articulated by existing scholarship by identifying the gaps in our understanding of the activist consciousness of this war-torn country.

2.3 THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

With the advent of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2019, once again communities suffering from already existing categories of oppression have been the most affected, and, at the time of writing, they continue to be vulnerable at the hands of states and healthcare systems. Gendered divisions of society, especially in the Global South, have taken a significant toll on bodies and minds (Swenden et al., 2022). Mainstream media and news outlets reporting of pandemic failed to capture sharp divides among groups across race, ethnic, religious, class, caste, gender, sexuality, exposure to violence, disability, profession (essential workers), and age.

In countries like Lanka, social distancing is not a novel concept. People from specific socio-cultural locations have always been socially, culturally, and politically isolated by different systems of oppression (Divakalala, 2005, 2020). For instance, members of the Vellalar caste will most likely distance themselves from other castes (see Section 1.2.2.4

above). The notion of distancing has complex meanings beyond the merely physical one. Hence, distancing in this context could make the oppressed more vulnerable to the pandemic in the absence of access to sanitation (a functioning toilet), healthcare facilities, and clean drinking water.

From conversations with young activists from the North and the East of Lanka during the pandemic, I learned that young activists from different parts of Lanka have begun to voice their concerns over the influence of gender, sexuality, and caste hierarchies in the time of COVID-19. Community organising in the time of COVID-19 includes online campaigns to raise awareness on the arbitrary arrest of bloggers who criticise the state for inappropriate handling of religiously divided communities in Lanka; assisting sex workers who receive no support from other bodies due to the illegality of the profession in the country; and assisting people living in poverty to get access to essential items.

The Lankan sociology professor emeritus Kalinga Tudor Silva (2020) argues that the role of international religious movements on the spread of COVID-19 across national borders is less well-known and requires further investigation in order to understand the impacts of the pandemic across divisions of ethnicity and religion (Silva, 2020). In the South Asian region, renowned feminist political activists including Arundhati Roy (2020) started to speak out about the irresponsible actions of the state and the mass exodus of migrant workers. My doctoral research intends to explore the emerging nuances of socio-political activism during (and immediately after) a global pandemic.

As illustrated above, the focus on women's activism in Lanka, especially by those on the margins, is intended to provide a more insightful understanding of specific issues arising in the Lankan post-war context where ethnic and religious conflicts are again increasing (Amarasingham, 2019; Singh, 2019). The previous chapter highlighted different forms of oppression and how they unfold in people's everyday lives in the region under this study. Women's groups are the main actors responding to all forms of oppression, and this thesis engages with the concept of socio-political activism by identifying the processes that develop and nurture an activist consciousness dedicated to, but not limited to, the liberation of women.

2.4 CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

In 2007, a special issue of *Women's Studies Quarterly* called 'Activisms' was dedicated to scholarly work on women's activism by scholars working in the Global South. Dorothy L. Hodgson and Ethel Brooks (2007) emphasised the two main objectives of the issue. The first

focuses on activisms emerging from the Global South in various forms, including conversations, experiences, and events that scholars have observed and participated. The second promotes conversations on the problematics of knowledge production among activists and academics (Hodgson & Brooks, 2007, p. 14). My thesis addresses both these objectives by offering insights into the complexities of everyday activism in the context of post-war Northern Lanka, and by revisiting the space of activism and scholarship in terms of contribution to knowledge production.

I situate this thesis within the wider effort to strengthen representation of theories and practices from the Global South and/or people of colour. I am particularly interested in a South–South dialogue where thinkers/makers and doers/practitioners nurture various lenses of critique to understand and appropriate their skills and approaches. The already established analytical categories – especially those derived from a place of privileged white Western thinkers – must be adequately critiqued before adopting them in non-Western contexts. I carefully tease out the details of women's activism in my chosen sites by identifying and engaging with their consciousnesses. In the context of the oppressive surveillance of Lankan lives, I am conscious that what I am researching and writing about has to be responsibly weaved into narratives that are shared publicly. This concern was shared by the participants of this study. I discuss this further in the methodology section. The findings of my research are offered here in the hope they will positively influence the lives of those who are marginalised and encourage other researchers to explore this field.

With regard to the critical feminist scholarship of post-war Lanka, Sivamohan (2016, pp. 394–395) writes:

> Today, as we are still trying to find our war through the post-war maze of encounters, narrations and accountings, we see political and discursive openings querying the certitudes of nationalism and its exclusions. There is growing space for dialogue within the Tamil polity: individuals are returning to a state of picking up the threads of conversation left off abruptly, even as mothers, daughters, leaders and evicted communities like the Muslims make a resounding call for justice for all the injustices of the war, the massacres, the rapes, the disappearances, the forcible recruitments of child soldiers, the evictions and the dissident murders.

Young activists in the post-war context are probing in different fields and levels to explore what has been silenced and/or could not be shared in its full form. My thesis applies analytical lenses to understand the multifaceted lives of women and their activist consciousness, and employs methodological innovation to ensure that tales of oppression and resistance in various forms are explored without allowing polarisation to limit their scope.

Hence, the main research question of my thesis is:

> *In contexts of historical violence and the troubling legacy of social, cultural and ideological divisions, how do young activists sustain their consciousness to work for social change in post-war social justice movements even as divisions, and difficulties persist?*

I discuss my main and sub-research questions, positionality, ethnics, and the formulation of an analytical framework in the next section.

My thesis contributes to scholarly debates on the search for social justice by exploring how political praxis founded on collective consciousness and action is precipitated through the unlikeliest of solidarities in the context of post-war society. As my case study is from Lanka, the findings increase the knowledge production of the Global South. My thesis also has an underlying advocacy objective whereby I hope that intervention programmes across the world, especially those that address the liberation of marginalised populations, start to nurture critical perspectives by moving beyond the limits of the institutionalisation and Westernisation of feminism and making a conscious effort not to depoliticise queer feminist politics in their engagements that do not fit into dominant frameworks.

PART II

THE STUDY OF

INTERSECTIONAL SUBALTERN ACTIVIST

CONSCIOUSNESS

The introductory chapters of this thesis (Parts I and II) demonstrated why we need more scholarship on the politics of knowledge production among social activists in marginalised contexts. It also explained the novel contributions to social activism and activist consciousness theory and practice that my thesis is making.

Part II consists of two chapters. Chapter 3 starts with a conceptual foregrounding and moves on to offer an insightful and theoretically grounded discussion on how I arrived at the main and sub-research questions, the aim, and principles of my study, and how I locate myself as a researcher in this field. I also introduce my research participants in this chapter. I explain the transition to my doctoral research project with insights, especially into identified gaps in the literature. The methodology section provides an overview of the dynamic context in which the activists' experiences in Lanka needed to be located and analysed, and presented the methods adopted in this research. It also provides insight into how their experiences help them to look beyond the dominant meanings and concepts of their societies.

I offer intersectional understandings of the concepts of social activism and activist consciousness and showed the need to identify critical processes of knowing practices where one can apply knowledge that is contextualised and innovative. Simultaneously, one needs to be constantly critical and self-critical from the perspective of subaltern locations, histories, and politics. This reaffirmed my own commitment to activist scholarship and the communities in which I am involved and invested. The insider/outsider dilemma helps me to be critical of my own positions, privileges, and limitations and work harder to produce and promote critical alternative discourses. For these reasons, I believe this interdisciplinary research contributes to the documenting of lesser-known social movements in Lanka while making theoretical interventions with regard to subaltern theory.

The relevant theoretical frameworks are outlined in Chapter 4, where I explore the concepts of subaltern activists' consciousness of the politics of scholarship from the Global South; the importance of framing; the question of gender that highlights the gap in existing scholarship from certain locations, histories, and politics; the need to move beyond binary understandings of sex and gender to gain a deeper understanding of society in its diverse complexity; and the application of feminisms that emerges from subaltern locations and politics as an evolving tool to understand these nuances better and deeper, especially as means of critiquing normative practices. Lanka, like every social context, brings specific historical challenges, and my thesis makes conceptual contributions that I hope might inspire future

scholarship that focused on similar marginalised histories, the ethos of knowledge production, and politics.

The journey of this study explained in Parts I and II gradually transitions to Part III which not only offers profound insights into trans and intersex persons' and women's experiences with war, violence, and resistance but also contributes to theoretical innovations through intertwined processes of identifying, problematising, analysing, and moving from critiquing to construction of conceptual explorations.

3

METHODOLOGY

> What does justice entail a decade after the end of the war in Sri Lanka? From here, it would seem deeply flawed to romanticise or attempt to recoup the LTTE as a productive counterforce to the chauvinism of the Sinhala-Buddhist state. It is also impossible to call for justice for Tamils without doing so for others who suffered during the decades-long conflict, such as Muslim communities in the North and East. Justice also implicates all those complicit with the atrocities that occurred in the final stages of the war and not only the Sri Lankan army. (Sivanesan, 2020, p. 40)

The above quote offers a glimpse of how complex the idea of justice is in post-war Lanka. It identifies some of the nuances that this particular part of the Global South offers to our understanding and theorising activism, social movements, and activists consciousnesses.

The complex role of activists and the development of an activist consciousness have been positively shaping a post-war Lankan society that is still experiencing extreme marginalisations and is still vulnerable to violence. Research engaging with this section of society requires specialised knowledge and innovative theoretical frameworks that can capture activists' voices while developing a strategic framework to help facilitate change. This chapter illustrates how this thesis engages with such vital concerns.

I aim to augment knowledge production from the Global South by advocating for subaltern voices and experiences on the margins. The binary of the Global South and Global North is weaved in my thesis with the awareness that the subaltern experiences of discrimination exist at multiple levels simultaneously. They are often relational and profoundly intersectional. Hence, this thesis attempts to answer the following research question:

> *In contexts of historical violence and the troubling legacy of social, cultural and ideological divisions, how do young activists sustain their consciousness to work for social change in post-war social justice movements even as divisions and difficulties persist?*
>
> The following sub-questions will be pursued to tease out the specifics of the main research question:
>
> (i) *What are the differences young activists negotiate to find common ground amongst themselves?*
> (ii) *How do they organise beyond the legacy of differences?*
> (iii) *How do they negotiate unequal dynamics of their interpersonal relations to one another?*
> (iv) *Have they been able to broaden their conception of inequality and oppression? If yes, how?*
> (v) *What is their relationship with groups/collectives that work on different forms of oppression?*

I believe Gayatri Spivak's (1993) observations on the activism she witnessed in Bangladesh after a catastrophic cyclone and tidal wave not only speak to the complex realities of the young activists' experiences that I unpack in my thesis but also mirror the ethical position of my research and the cautious and well-informed probing that I adopt in my methodology:

> I was just very recently in the cyclone and tidal wave area of Bangladesh. Apart from everything else, I had been asked to do a little bit of investigation into various kinds of foreign interventions in that area. I was in the center of the area where the worst devastation had occurred, and I spent time there, as usual, joining in the work as alibi for the opportunity to see the object of politics as the judges of ethical position. So when I came back to the capital city of Bangladesh, one of the activists asked me very quickly, because he was running around; obviously, at the time of disaster you don't sit down and have a chat. He sort of quickly came into the room (and there were other people there), and he asked me, "What did you see?" Now, this man is an extremely intellectually sophisticated man, a poet and all that, but his work is basically what we call activism. And I knew that what he was asking when he asked "What did you see?" was not a report on the conditions of devastation or a glamorised report on "what I had done," because he does very much more-he is the one who was running the survey teams, so I couldn't tell him anything. What he was asking-one could translate it into fast Greek, as it were-was really about the visibility that comes when you theorise. (Spivak, 1993, as cited in Danius & Jonsson, 1993, p. 26)

3.1 LOCATING SUBALTERN FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

My search for an appropriate methodology began by locating subaltern feminist consciousness in and from the Global South and the people-of-colour scholarship from outside of the Global South that resonated with my study. This process was twofold. First, I searched for examples from different parts of the world where communities have been addressing skewed power in ways that made sense to them at a given point of time. Second, I looked at subaltern feminist theorising in a range of disciplines and topics that offer insights on concepts related to consciousness. My desire was to navigate the space where theory and practice interact proactively and help each other grow.

In this thesis, I use subaltern and feminist scholarship to develop a profound understanding of the voices and experiences of women on the margins. I also use relevant critical feminist scholarship produced by people of colour in the West. These conceptualisations emerge from a place of consciousness that prioritises experiences that often fall outside the dominant society's normalisations and mainstreamed knowledge production. Hence, my use of the term 'subaltern' signifies various marginalised locations and those on the margins. The work by Western scholars of colour speaks to the subaltern context of my study. I explore critical lenses offered by this body of scholarship to locate activist feminist consciousness. Feminist scholars have approached the concept of consciousness from various perspectives highlighting how gender, power relations, embodiment, and social structures intersect with our understanding of consciousness (Baisantry, 1999; Combahee River Collective, 1979; Collins, 1990; Cooper, 1892; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981; Gines, 2015; hooks, 2009; Lawrence, 2015; Lugones, 2008; Mohammed, 2018; Mohanty, 1988; Nayar, 2006). With the support of existing literature, I show that activist feminist consciousness is continually shifting its tenets based on the experiences of navigating power hierarchies of multiple forms and levels and choosing the battles based on the complex everydayness of oppression across time and space.

One of the branches of postcolonial scholarship – the subaltern theories developed by the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group scholars inspired by Gramscian ideas and appropriated by a few South American and African theorists – argues for an epistemic standpoint to evolve from the subaltern perspective. As noted earlier, Spivak (1988) eloquently points out that researchers, knowledge producers, and practitioners ought to be constantly self-reflexive and self-critical when representing the West's Other (the Third World) and the Third World's Other (the subaltern) (Spivak, 1988). I use Spivak's concept of the subaltern to

emphasise how particular experiences of young activists in the highly controlled – both by the community as well as the state – post-war context of Northern Lanka brings nuances to subaltern identities (i.e., how they influence the understanding of social activism by young women) and occupy a unique place in the context of the Global South (Spivak, 1988). This is a novel contribution to theory and practice.

I have argued above that the experiences of social organising in the post-war context produce a certain kind of consciousness among young activists. Academic research is yet to document and reflect upon this phenomenon (Saroor, 2014). This thesis does so by drawing on Black, subaltern (postcolonial), and decolonial feminist scholars who have been advocating that experiences from different socio-political and cultural contexts do not always fit into Western frameworks and white liberal ideologies (Collins, 1990; Cooper, 1892; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981; Gines, 2015; hooks, 2009; Lawrence, 2015; Lugones, 2008; Mohanty, 1988; Oyewumi, 1997; Paravisini-Gebert, 1997; Roy, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

I also draw upon another body of work where feminist consciousness gets shaped: autobiographies by women who have challenged one or more forms of oppression in their societies. For instance, in her autobiography *Dohra Abhishaap* ('Doubly Cursed'), Kausalya Baisantry (1999) narrates her experiences along with the experiences of her family and community at large via a strong Dalit consciousness to fight against injustices caused by untouchability and patriarchy in India (Baisantry, 1999; Gidla, 2017). Her autobiography – the first by a Dalit woman written in Hindi – highlights the intersection of caste and sexist divisions, providing a vital subaltern context that I believe conveys a feminist consciousness based on her desire to fight patriarchy to liberate Dalit women. These women have historically been reduced to scavengers, responsible for carrying human and animal waste out of the city, which has led to diseases including respiratory problems. They are often forced to turn to sex work, dwell in poor housing, and have no access to education (Baisantry, 1999; Gidla, 2017). By unpacking this, I strengthen the link between Dalit women's experiences and Lankan activism for social change.

I also draw on another autobiographical account, *Karukku* by Bama – a Dalit woman from South India. *Karukku* was published in Tamil in 1992, and the English translation appeared in 2000 (Nayar, 2006). Pramod K. Nayar (2006) argues that such narratives by Dalit women have transformative potential due to their critical consciousness expressed through subalternity and collective experiences of oppression. The works of Bama and Baisantry show that the experiences of women in such subaltern contexts cannot be fully interpreted without identifying the presence of other intersecting forms of oppression.

The existing literature on feminist consciousness from the Global South suggests that feminist consciousness is predominantly associated with the motive to sustain feminist movements (Mohammed, 2018, p. 4). Drawing on a range of feminist scholars from the Global South and feminist scholars of colour from the West, Patricia Mohammed (2018) argues for feminist consciousness building across borders that not only *recognises* differences but also *deals with* differences in ways that strengthen solidary building while acknowledging the power relations within and between social hierarchies. Following these scholarly contributions, I explore a feminist consciousness that advocates for a profound sense of connection in the process of critically engaging with differences that are not limited by divisional politics and/or the colonial strategy of divide and conquer. I therefore ask: How do young activists negotiate unequal dynamics of their interpersonal relations to one another, and what is their relationship with groups/collectives that work on different forms of oppression?

The above discussion shows that the need for research on subaltern feminist consciousness shaped by those who emerge from subaltern locations is a pressing one. This will be what my thesis offers by exploring the question – in context of historical violence and the troubling legacy of social, cultural, and ideological divisions – how do young activists sustain their consciousness to work for social change in post-war social justice movements even as divisions and difficulties persist? Along with interviews with young activists, I have also analysed texts produced by them to tease out further insights into the subaltern feminist consciousness evoked by their struggles with oppressive norms and practices.

3.2 RESEARCH POSITIONALITY: INSIDER/OUTSIDER

The journey of this thesis started with an acute awareness that research methods suitable for capturing the complexity of intersecting identities within the Global South context require a combination of (1) feminist standpoint epistemological (knowers/doers and knowledge makers), (2) activist research, and (3) critical ethnographical (qualitative methods of data collection) approaches to the production of knowledge. Several feminist scholars like Alison Wylie (2004), Kathryn Pyne Addelson (1993), Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (1993), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Sandra Harding (1987, 1989, 2004, 2008), Sylvia Walby (2001), Uma Narayan (1997), and Vrinda Dalmiya (2002) have offered feminist epistemologies that are critical of the position of knowledge holders and knowledge producers. Their work problematises "the politics of knowledge and the impacts of the social status as well as the sexed body of the knower upon production of knowledge" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 2), where

they not only critically reflect on the kind of knowing practices that have been recognised as possessing epistemic credentials and hence made it to the realm of knowledge, but also emphasise certain kinds of practice that need to be incorporated in feminist theorising when it comes to knowledge production.

The feminist philosopher Kathryn Pyne Addelson (1993) helps to locate my thesis. First, Addelson nurtures a self-critical perspective. She shows that while feminist epistemology should ask essential questions of traditional epistemology, it also needs to be self-critical of its location within the academy and the West. In other words, she shows that critical understanding of 'ourselves' as knowledge makers is crucial. Second, Addelson emphasises the need to move beyond mere normative claims to do a responsible job of criticising knowledge makers. She is calling out ways in which the usefulness and adequacy of the normative claims of feminist epistemology have to be tested in practice – that is, in the social world of activists. This also connects to knowing ourselves as knowledge makers (Addelson, 1993, pp. 265–270).

The work of Addelson informs this study which explores ways in which the social worlds of an activist from a specific location offer profound insights into the production of knowledge on activism in the post-war context. For instance, applying the model of descriptive epistemology in her analysis, Addelson (1993) suggests that knowledge claims must resist all forms of domination if they are to prioritise a responsible approach. She points out that direct collaboration with the activists of the women's movement is inevitable if feminist epistemologies want to produce knowledge responsibly. My thesis resonates with this approach.

Following Addelson's (1993) assertion that responsibility must be articulated within the academy, I will now locate myself with respect to this thesis. I come from the community under study in this research. I am also attempting to pursue a career in academia in the West. I navigate the dichotomy of being an insider/outsider in both spaces. I carry a specialised knowledge of the context that puts me in an ideal position to tease out the nuances and connect to subjugated populations. For this, I borrow insights from eminent Black feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins (1986) and bell hooks (1984, 2000a–b), who have offered critical views on the 'outsider in' and the 'insider out' that shape the epistemic advantages of holding multiple roles within communities as well as in academia (Ahmed, 2006; Collins, 1986; hooks, 1984, 2000a-b). Inspired by such legendary scholars, my thesis is an academic collaboration together with activists from Northern Lanka, one that is designed to produce knowledge on how we understand the complexities of dominant discourses related to oppression and marginalisation in a post-war context.

I connect this collaboration to the main arguments of feminist standpoint epistemology that insists knowledge is socially situated and that any research focusing on power relations must begin with the experiences of the marginalised (Ahmed, 2006; Harding, 1987). My work is informed by the argument that women's experiences ought to be considered as empirical and theoretical resources. Hence, research on women must be designed to expand the scope of learning from women's experiences, and locating the researcher in the research must also be a subject matter of inquiry (Harding, 1987). I include trans and intersex persons' experiences so that they can be included in any empirical and conceptual resources that emerge from this research. The principles of community-based participatory research and a collaborative approach to research (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006) further strengthened my fieldwork practice.

In the past decade, activist research across the world has provided multiple spaces for many activists and/or researchers to transform the field of academic research through their critical analytical and insightful work/engagements (Brown & Strega, 2005; Hale, 2008). According to one of the pioneers of activist scholarship, R. Charles Hale (2008), activist research plays a critical role in the process of making meaning out of the experiences of discrimination, oppression, and suffering. Hale suggests that activist research is an evolving process with an openness to explore and learn with the people for whom the conditions/issues in question are an everyday reality. The adjective 'activist' in 'activist research' refers to how the research projects and the methods are conceived and carried out (Hale, 2008). In other words, it refers to a research methodology that is deeply rooted in the principles of activism in a given community/society with people from the same community/society. These tenets of activist scholarship helped build the methodological foundations of this thesis.

From my experience of conducting qualitative research in Lankan communities to advocate for social justice since 2004, I was aware of the crucial aspects of injustice that can influence the research project itself. I began to be conscious of the same by continually engaging with the possibilities of eliminating them. Working in groups of people from different backgrounds always helps, because someone will point out something that someone else has missed. The transformative aspect of activist research contributes to identifying more than one way of knowing and producing knowledge. As a result, multiple ways of knowing practices are produced, reproduced, and transformed along with the people from whom the knowledge is extracted. In summary, being mindful of the power-related questions and transformative practices of deconstructing activism results in a process that articulates the production of knowledge and the dominant practices that exclude certain kinds of voices, which helps to modify our approaches to research techniques. Critical feminist critiques of methods of data

collection and analytical categories guided me to achieve this goal, even amid the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3 Empirical Research in the Time of COVID-19

I intended to do critical ethnography motivated by the outstanding work of contemporary ethnographers who challenge traditional concepts by revisiting the methods and approaches of the field (Madison, 2006; Mahmood, 2005; Pulido, 2008; Vargas, 2008). For instance, João H. Costa Vargas (2008) argues for 'observant participation' instead of the traditional method of 'participant observation'. According to him, the practice of participant observation emphasises the act of observing, whereas observant participation "refers to active participation in the organised group, such that observation becomes an appendage of the main activity" (Vargas, 2008, pp. 175–176). Everyday activity in the field should be part of the process of self-critique and eventual reformulation of reality (Vargas, 2008). Such critical perspectives and ways of understanding ethnography have expanded the scope of the method in terms of how the ethnographer associates herself/himself in the field, and I had hoped to integrate the same critical lenses into every aspect of this research.

However, due to travel restrictions imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I could not physically return to Lanka as planned. Given my familiarity and the insider/outsider knowledge of the location under study, I was able to transform the fieldwork into a virtual experience. Data collection commenced in December 2020, and the last interview was conducted in June 2021. Over this period, various spaces came into contact with the virtual field of my thesis. Geographically speaking, all research participants joined me in the virtual space from different parts of Northern Lanka; I joined from Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, Aotearoa/New Zealand, the location of my university. Although I could imagine the geographical dimensions of the places my research participants were speaking of, they could not do the same as they had never been to Aotearoa.

Most interviews started with an exchange of what was going on in our lives and where we were geographically located, especially in the context of the pandemic. This helped build rapport and enabled a gradual slide into the interview proper. My approach echoed the Australian Aboriginal concept of Dadirri – a deep listening, as articulated by Aboriginal activist Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann (2002):

> What I want to talk about is another special quality of my people. I believe it is the most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language this quality is called dadirri. It is inner, deep

> listening and quiet, still awareness. Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call "contemplation".

Due to the nature of my study, the sample selection was purposive. Key informants played a vital role in connecting me with prospective participants. The interviews were held in the first language of all involved, Tamil. I transcribed each interview before conducting the next one. After completing four interviews, there was a gap of around eight weeks, primarily due to the increased spread of COVID-19 in Northern Lanka. This gave an organic pause to the data collection and time to step back from the data collection and identify emerging patterns based on the first four interviews.

I shared the information sheet and the consent form with all participants before the interviews. They returned the signed digital copy of the consent form. I paid attention to their surroundings at the time of the virtual interviews and asked them what they had been doing in the past months, how the context of COVID-19 has changed their everyday lives and their communities, and how they sustained their activist work in a global pandemic. All participants agreed for the interview to be audio recorded and to be contacted a second time in the future for purposes of clarification. Most of them expressed interest in receiving a copy of the findings. The interviews lasted for about 90 minutes.

Approximately four months into data collection, I hired a research assistant to gather secondary data from Northern Lanka. She – the research assistant – is an activist in her late twenties with over a decade-long experience working on social justice issues concerning those who are discriminated against due to various identities, such as sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and caste. We met in 2012 at a youth programme that I was co-hosting. Since then, we have worked on various projects, including collaborative research and activism related to women's rights in general, violence against women and girls with a particular focus on sexual violence, the rights of trans persons, disability rights, and land rights of ethnic minorities in numbers.

The secondary data collection focused on the social media engagement of the research participants. I aimed to offer insights into the online presence of activists, especially amid a global pandemic. However, I quickly learned that due to the volatile security situations and continuous threats to activists' lives in the post-war context, only a few of them have an online presence, which is carefully navigated. Therefore, I have not explicitly used the online content gathered to avoid putting any of my research participants in danger.

During the first reading of the transcribed interviews in Tamil, I noted down reoccurring words, emotions, and a particular moment and/or experience regarding socio-political, economic, and geographical contexts, along with any emerging patterns. I also made a note of thoughts and ideas triggered by the interview texts. Often, the historical references overlapped with my memories of events and/or milestones shared by the research participants. My knowledge of the same has helped me go deeper to bring out the nuances and complexities of these events. In this way, an exercise of collective recollection of historical events contributed to our consciousness development.

3.4 A NOTE ON ETHICS

It is vital to ethically represent people's voices and concerns without taking them away from the histories, contexts, and identities shaping their everyday lives. The existing network of activists I already had access to helped me to achieve the necessary data collection despite the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, my more than two decades of experience doing community-based action research and research methodology training assisted me in navigating this empirical research project in the time of a global pandemic.

As a queer ciswoman researcher from the Global South, researching my own country, my own personal experiences are powerfully related to the broader context this thesis explores. I treat research as a "political, socially-just and socially-conscious act" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). I borrow/invoke/enact the practices of self-reflexivity, ethical responsibility, and social consciousness throughout my research. Each provides a kind of situatedness, allowing me to be critical of my own privileged positions and anticipate the influences that such positions could have during the fieldwork. Together they helped me to map out the research design so that I did not silence the very voices I was hoping to amplify, and to simultaneously situate myself in the field as effectively as possible.

The medium of interaction with my research participants was Tamil, my first language. A brief explanation of my doctoral research purpose was shared with each participant and their respective groups or collectives. As noted above, all participants signed a consent form. The participants were treated as autonomous subjects and active agents who could choose to participate or not. The time and place of interaction was decided according to their preferences. The data collected were stored responsibly according to the standard ethical codes of a research study. Confidentiality was assured, and pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all

participants. The use of language was sensitive to any social, cultural, and political beliefs of the participants.

My interaction with the research participants was conversational in nature. I practised attentive and deep listening, and sensitively probed for more information. I developed a sense of custodial care towards the stories being shared in confidence. I was mindful of the need to be careful about how the narratives were portrayed to ensure communities were not put at risk. This ethos was shared by both the participants and me. Towards the end of each interview, I ensured my participants felt valued and not as if they were being used for their life struggles by talking about general and everyday things, like what they were going to do for the rest of the day and their favourite foods.

My connections with the extensive activist network in Northern Lanka helped me to form a rapport with all participants. Months after our conversations, through the same activist network and friends, I established that my participants had not suffered any adverse consequences due to their participation in this research. The research assistant who helped with secondary data collection is still in touch with them. I maintain regular contact with my key informants – including the research assistant – beyond the scope of this thesis, as I am still active in my activist work despite the physical distance between us.

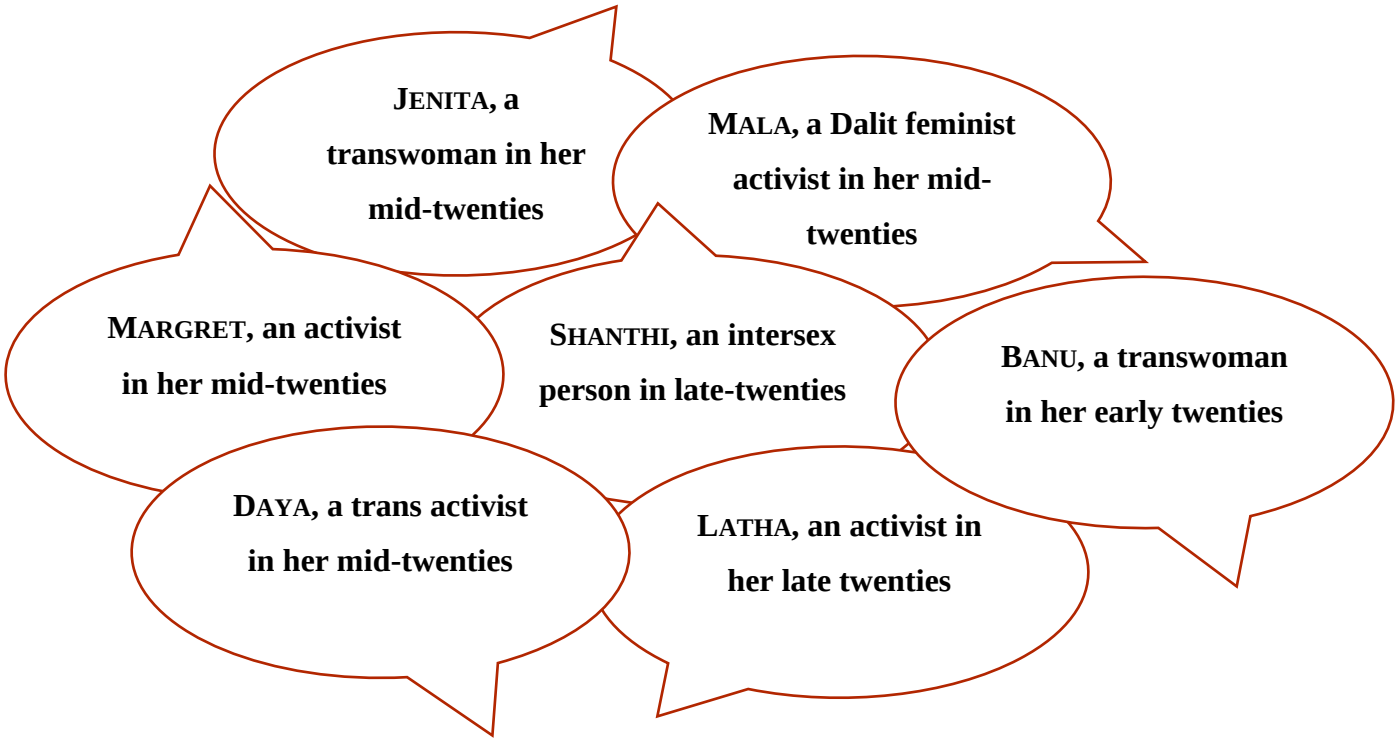
I consciously defamiliarised the familiar with the help of my physical distance from the field and by being self-critical, searching for analytical reflections, and regularly debriefing with my supervisor(s). I also made a conscious effort to be alive (to be conscious and awake) in my fieldnote writing by using techniques suggested by Kirin Narayan (2012), incorporating the process of critical reflexivity into the everyday aspect of research.

3.5 MEET MY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The seven activist participants of my doctoral research (Figure 3) predominantly work with trans collectives and women's groups and networks in Northern Lanka on issues related to violence against women, sexual and health rights of women from the region, access to land, disability issues, and enforced disappearances. I have given pseudonyms to each of them for ethical reasons. Their preferred pronouns are used throughout this thesis. They are either Tamil or Muslim and their first language is Tamil. The activists come from diverse backgrounds in terms of class, caste, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, profession/education, physical disabilities, and exposure to violence at home and/or in the community. However, their lives, struggles, experiences of discrimination, and activism are connected Whenever they come together to

share a common platform for social change, their backgrounds and identities are the sources of both divisions and connections. Hence, I use Figure 3 to illustrate the relationality and connectedness as well as the importance of particular locations and histories each one of them brings to this study. These nuances are discussed in detail in Part III.

Figure 3: My Research Participants



3.6 FORMULATING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This is a study of intersecting subaltern experiences of discrimination and activism from specific locations and histories. The literature review on activism and activist consciousness guided me to learn, review, ponder, relearn, and critique to develop the research design. With the help of the insights from the literature and in-depth interviews with my research participants, I weave an analytical framework to offer new insights into how activist consciousness is formed, shared, shaped, reformed, critiqued, and transformed.

I explore the concept of activist consciousness by deepening the analysis of how socio-political locations of complex hierarchies such as ethnicity, caste, class, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexuality shape the consciousness of young activists working in the post-war context of Northern Lanka. Such complex hierarchies often produce intertwined systems of oppression, including multifaceted structural violence and explore common themes that

characterise these systems (Collins, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1979; Crenshaw, 1991; Weber, 2010).

To understand Black women's experiences, black feminists have developed analytical frameworks to capture intersecting power structures that oppress black women in the patriarchal capitalist society of the United States. Black women's unique experiences are linked to their social position of simultaneously occupying multiple oppressed positions (Black, female, and poor), and this often rendered their experiences invisible in mainstream social science research that analysed race, class, gender, and sexuality (Combahee River Collective, 1979).

The Black feminist activists of the Combahee River Collective focused on the movement for Black liberation in the 1960s and 1970s (Carastathis, 2016). They were the first to articulate the concept of intersectionality, defining as interlocking systems of oppression. Their dreams of freedom and liberation challenged the universalised interpretations of race and gender in the absence of other forms of oppression:

> We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (Combahee River Collective, 1979, p. 6)

Their research methods, ethics of producing knowledge, and analytical frameworks are inspired by such deep thinking and the contributions of past social movements. The 18th- and early 19th-century Black women intellectuals and activists (such as Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells), feminist activists from the Combahee River Collective who issued the "A Black Feminist Statement" in 1979, and contemporary scholars such as Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) and Patricia H. Collins (1990) employed intersectionality and the matrix of domination to explore state-sanctioned violence against black women, and brought intersectional meanings to my thesis and the way I make sense of activist experiences. I adapt the three main tenets central to intersectionality argued by these groups of profound thinkers: (1) history, (2) context-specific, and (3) simultaneity (Crenshaw, 1991; Weber, 2010). The matrix of domination (Collins, 1990, pp. 553–556) explores the deeper workings of institutionalised power across four domains that permeate society: (1) structural, (2) disciplinary, (3) hegemonic, and (4) institutional.

As discussed earlier, state-inflicted violence as interpersonal violence against people in Northern Lanka has relegated many women to a place of extreme marginalisation where the state often ignores them. Intersectionality and the matrix of domination are ideal analytical frameworks to help identify sources of subjugation, articulate their experiences, and develop strategies tailored to their specific needs. For instance, I attentively focused on both what overtly surfaced and what lay in the background during my interviews, looking for every intersection of the complex hierarchies at play. Weber (2010) argues that the complexity of hierarchies based on socio-political locations can be located in everyday negotiations between the self and the surrounding institutions, systems, and ideologies. She also points out that they play a vital role in how one perceives them/her/himself. Weber (2010) therefore suggests that an analytical framework must help to deepen our understandings of the world through multiple lenses that can capture the intersections of multiple social hierarchies.

In this thesis, I ask the 'Other question' posed by feminist law professor Maria Matsuda (1991, p. 1189) to generate dialogues based on marginalised experiences from diverse backgrounds:

> The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call "ask the other question." When I see something that looks racist, I ask, "Where is the patriarchy in this?" When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, "Where is the heterosexism in this?" When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, "Where are the class interests in this?"

Matsuda (1991) neatly articulates the nuances of intersectional understandings of the world. Feminists of colour accentuate the deep roots of the concept of intersectionality. For example, as early as 1892 Anna Julia Cooper had identified intersectional aspects of Black women's experiences from the Global South by showing how their stories brought out various elements of class and religious differences. I am particularly interested in the intersectional lens that she offers from certain positionality to locate and understand diverse experiences, which I believe is vital in expanding concepts with insightful and contextually and historically situated findings and interpretations of marginalised lives. During the years of second-wave feminism (from the early 1970s to the early 1980s), feminists of colour emphasised that 'women's experiences' cannot be generalised under the broader framework of 'women' due to diversities within the category of 'women' and 'women's experiences'. They further argued that experiences of women of colour differ from the experiences of men of colour as well as white women's experiences (Thorgerdur, 2007). With the help of intersectionality, feminist theorisations could become more effective by producing a range of analytical tools. Mahmood (2005) noted that the existing feminist analytical tools did not help to articulate women's agency. I believe that

feminist theorising around the intersectional analysis of women's experiences helps prevent women from being conformed to a single narrative that sees them as single-dimensional.

The above frameworks are also rooted in community-based activism. A central goal of this research is to engage with activists on the frontlines identifying and addressing violence against women in the aftermath of an ethnic war. Hence, this study's analytical framework is well suited to activist research, given its origins in Black feminism. I aim to present multifaceted experiences of young activists by documenting how they view their activism, the struggles and journeys of other activists, and how activists from different backgrounds influence one another, work towards transformations, and build solidarities (Davis, 1981; Weber, 2010). I have observed from my own experience of activism that, in the lives of activists, a sense of a shared identity is as important as personal identity. Hence, I believe that my thesis contributes to the concept of intersectionality as an analytical framework by expanding each element of this framework with extensive narratives on personal and communal experiences while the legacies of difference persist. The use of multiple lenses across hierarchies juxtaposing with individual and collective socio-political locations provides adequate data for a profound discussion on how the intersection of complex socio-political locations shapes an activist space (which is presented in Chapters 5–8).

I borrow the conceptual approaches of "multiple axes of oppression" (Jalušič, 2010, p. 32), interlocking systems of oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1979), and the matrix of domination (Collins, 1990) to analyse individual and collective experiences. The relationship between forms of oppression and power relations as exercised and perceived by the activists themselves helps to identify interlocking systems that characterise consciousness processes such as transformable individual and collective experiences of dominance, subordination, and resistance. I also map the margins of political activism by deepening the discussion on the concepts of 'structural intersectionality' and 'political intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1991). For instance, I argue that the centre(s) and periphery(ies) continuously shift over time and space and are only a tool and not fixed lenses through which one should view empirical data. My focus is not merely the inclusion of specific sections of women's activism, but the perspectives they bring with them into the public sphere, as the boundaries between the two are often blurred, especially in the context of tenuous circumstances of everyday life (Abeysekera, 1999, 2006).

As noted above, Gayatri Spivak (1978, 1988, 2013) problematises the categorisation of Third World women, the subaltern's positionalities, and the ethical responsibilities of

knowledge producers in the West. Inspired by the work of Spivak, Ilan Kapoor (2004) questions the assumption that someone who is a geographic 'local' or who shares deep insights of those of the people themselves is necessarily a better knower. He also points out that researchers should be aware and critical of the level of influence they could have in silencing the very group they are claiming to represent.

I draw on Kapoor's concept of self-reflexivity to provide situatedness that addresses power hierarchies and the privileges produced in activism emerging from specific locations. This is informed by Foucault's concept of power, which, he maintains, is not only possessed or centralised (from top-down) or repressive (destructive/coercive) but also exercised, dispersed (from bottom-up) and productive (producing social relations; disciplining/normalising) (see Mills, 2003; Sawicki, 1991). Power is not located only in class, the state, and the law but also in the body, sexuality, and knowledge. According to Foucault, what is relevant is not only how a question will be answered, but who decided that it was an important question, what the way to answer it is, and what evidence/facts support the answer, which ultimately contributes to the truth claims made (Mills, 2003; Sawicki, 1991).

Although my methodology does not fall within the category of phenomenology, the process of making sense of the information gathered focuses on discovering the practical understandings of meanings and actions shared in the form of narratives (Berg, 2007; Phoenix, 2008). This thesis relies on the abovementioned interpretative and conceptual approaches to organise and interpret the information gathered, and it focuses on understanding the essence of the life experiences shared with me by the young activists.

This research does not deal with unstructured mass data. Hence, making sense of the seven interviews conducted along with the secondary data gathered needs to involve an interpretative approach and draw on insights offered by the existing scholarship from the same region. I did not employ any computer-based analysis and hence there is no risk of fragmentation of data (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. 65):

> It is important for summaries not to iron out the inconsistencies, contradictions and puzzles. To grasp a person through the 'whole' of what we know about him or her does not have to imply that he or she is consistent, coherent and rational. The form of a person's accounts (or whatever other data we have about his or her life) may become visible by concentrating on these 'fractures'."

Furthermore, I focus on the essence of understanding the whole text while paying attention to social, cultural, economic, geographical, and political contexts in which the activist consciousness has evolved and been shaped in social interactions since then. I have not reduced

the complexity of experiences, especially in the intersections of various forms of oppression. On the contrary, my analysis relies on understanding and unpacking such complexities (Kember et al., 2008). I do this by identifying recurring themes and patterns that emerge from the experiences of young activists in terms of how they develop a sense of consciousness that shapes their socio-political activism. Hence, a flexible interpretative process makes more sense (Deterding & Waters, 2021).

Hollway and Jefferson (2013, p. 3) point out that interpreting the experiences of research participants is vital to understand the nuances and complexities of what they share: "If we wish to do justice to the complexity of our subjects, an interpretative approach is unavoidable." They further argue that sociological knowledge based on shared cultural assumptions of interviewee and researcher can also help establish a more profound understanding (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013):

> [There is a] need to posit research subjects whose inner worlds cannot be understood without knowledge of their experiences in the world, and whose experiences of the world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way in which their inner worlds allow them to experience the outer world (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. 4)

In agreement with their insight, I do not treat my research participants as mere subjects with no agency articulating their life experiences as they were lived and/or experienced, and I am no stranger to the context of the research participants. This thesis sees the research process as a political project with a heightened awareness of the choices of expression (ambiguous articulations of their experiences) of my research participants and the interplay of power-ridden structures in which their experiences are experienced and shared or interpreted. Thus, the socio-political aspect of my thesis complements the processes of data collection and analysis.

The interpretative approach has been defined in various ways by social science researchers. According to Timulak and Elliott (2019, p. 11),

> Descriptive and interpretative approaches to qualitative research endeavour to keep a balance between the description of phenomena and the interpretation of the described phenomena. Given that researchers want to report concisely on what was found and, given that we are by nature meaning-making individuals, it is inevitable that any findings/results will be coloured by an interpretative framework.

Following the above theorising, I approach the experiences of young activists from a place of empathy and relatedness based on a shared history of experiences of oppression being forced to live in specific ways that are geographically, politically and socio-economically controlled by the authoritarian power of oppressive forces.

In summary, the analysis of the data collected for this research follows feminist traditions by critiquing existing analytical categories and by expanding the scope of theories and practices by drawing on the profound insights gained from my Lankan case study.

4

UNDERSTANDING SUBALTERN ACTIVIST CONSCIOUSNESS

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE II

இன்று இலங்கையில் வர்க்க, பாலின, சாதியப் போராட்டங்களைப் பின்தள்ளிவிட்டு இனத்துவ தேசப் போராட்டம் முன்னிலைக்குத் தள்ளப்பட்டுள்ளது. சிலவேளை இனத்துவ தேசப் போராட்ட முன்னெடுப்புக்கான தேவையே இருந்திராவிட்டால் அல்லது தேசப்போராட்டம் முடிவுக்குக் கொண்டு வரப்பட்டால், சாதியப் போராட்டம் முதன்மைக்கு வரக்கூடிய சாத்தியங்களும் இல்லாமல் இல்லை. எனவேதான் பொருளாதார குறுக்கல்வாதத்துக்குள் மார்க்சீயம் பேசுபவர்களாலோ அல்லது இனத்துவ தேசியவாதத்தில் மாத்திரம் மொத்த கவனத்தையும் செலுத்துபவர்களாலோ சமூக மாற்றத்தை நோக்கி முறையாக நகரவே முடிவதில்லை. சமூக உருவாக்கத்தினையும், அதன் அடித்தளம் மேற்கட்டுமானங்களையும் இனங்கண்டு நகர்தலே சமூக மாற்றத்தில் அக்கறை கொள்வோருக்கு உகந்த வழிமுறையாக இருக்க முடியும். (Saravanan, 2018, p. 66)

Today in Sri Lanka, ethnic national struggles have come to the fore, leaving behind class, gender, and caste struggles. It is not impossible that caste struggles may come to the fore again if the current ethnic national struggles find amicable solutions and are brought to an end. That is why those who talk of Marxism within economic marginalisation or who focus exclusively on ethnonationalism are unable to move systematically towards social change. Exploring social constructs and their underlying aspects of marginalisation can be a profound tool for those concerned with social change. (My translation)

4.1 STRENGTHENING MY SEARCH FOR SUBALTERN ACTIVIST CONSCIOUSNESS

In this review of the literature relevant to the topic of this thesis, I engage with scholarly insights on activism and activist consciousness based on the experiences of social justice movement from the Global South, people of colour in both the Global North and South, and those that help to illustrate the systems of power that shape the consciousness with an awareness of subaltern identities, locations, and politics. These insights offer conceptual directions I explore in Part III and are vital to understanding the kind of activism and activist consciousnesses that are not based on Western liberal notions and conceptualisations. Literature from the Global South inspired me to formulate my research questions and theorise in relation to subaltern histories and locations, which profoundly shape the spheres of knowledge production in the region. I show that critiques of Western liberal lenses, especially those that do not capture the nuances of the experiences of people of colour, significantly resonate with the research objectives and philosophy of my thesis. Hence, I am also inspired by people-of-colour theorists, critical thinkers, and activists in the West.

A plethora of literature on the political theorising of social activism focuses on the strengths, limitations, contours, and textures of social movements. Among the most notable are new social movement theory and political process theory (Edelman, 2001; Foweraker, 1995; Morris, 2000; Nagengast & Kearney, 1990; Offe, 1985). The concepts of democracy and democratic practices play a vital role in conceptualising social activism in different contexts (Bohman, 1999; della Porta, 2009). In the Global South, this scholarship has been critical of applying concepts developed in the Global North (Alagappa, 2004; Devotta, 2004; Ford, 2012; Lyons, 2000; Sitrin, 2012). Critics have shown that theories such new social movement theory, resource mobilisation theory, and political process theory are highly shaped by their genesis in the experience of the industrialised, liberal democratic Global North (Ford, 2012; Goodwin & Jasper, 1999; Klarman, 1991; Morris, 2000). Critical engagement with theories developed in the Global North has contributed to analyses that move beyond the established analytical concepts of social activism by questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning them (Ford, 2012). My thesis contributes to this revisioning of social activism for the Global South by providing nuanced understandings of the social activism of trans and intersex persons, and women from Northern Lanka.

My thesis uses experiences on the margins of society to explore the concepts and conceptualisation of social activism by locating what and who are often excluded from processes of knowledge production. The experiences of Global South activists are significantly

shaped by sex, gender, sexual, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, and language identities, and they are often marginalised and pushed to the margins of existence. Hence, I use subaltern and feminist theories to make sense of such experiences and critically analyse the process of knowledge production in terms of what is considered knowledge, how it is produced, and where and by whom (elaborated on in Chapters 2 - 4).

Subaltern theories help to locate the experiences of my research participants on the margins in nuanced ways that have not been explored before (Chakrabarty, 2015; Guha & Spivak, 1988; Kapoor, 2004). I show that a vibrant scholarship exists and has existed in this space of subaltern. The application of a subaltern lens to understand the sociology of society, especially in academia, has not been the focus in Lanka (Saravanan, 2018; Thiruchandran, 2021). My doctoral thesis changes that. The quote I open this chapter with illustrates the need to identify profound tools for social change by addressing structural marginalisations voiced by caste, class, and gender struggles. My thesis does this, and it is a novel contribution to the theory and practice.

Historically and geopolitically, subaltern theories help us understand why specific experiences have been pushed to the margins and by whom, and how subalternity is located and controlled (Gidwani, 2009; Ram, 2015). Understanding the nuanced elements of subalternity and how it is produced and reproduced helped me to locate activist consciousness in profound ways that had not yet been conceptualised. Hence, in locating and exploring subaltern activist and feminist consciousness my thesis makes a novel contribution to theorising, practices, and community work in the realm of social justice.

Feminist approaches to activism focus on individually created relations amongst social networks while keeping the analytical field open enough to capture different experiences in the process of informal and localised interactions that eventually may or may not evolve as movements or even get institutionalised (Martin et al., 2007). This scholarship also offers an understanding of feminist politics that acknowledges that feminist struggles need to identify the new energies emerging from different class, caste, and sexuality positions that constantly challenge and transform the feminist field. Similarly, new contestations of patriarchy and of normative feminism need to be explored within the subfields of feminism (Basu, 2010; Bhasin & Khan, 2004; Ng et al., 2006; Roces, 2010).

4.2 LOCATING SUBALTERN ACTIVIST CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The scholars of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group, which arose in the 1980s and was inspired by Gramscian ideas, argued that subalterns are the population on the margins that are often left out by hegemonic powers and knowledge productions (Chakrabarty, 2015; Guha & Spivak, 1988). At the same time, however, they are the life of the masses with greater consistency, cohesion, and political consciousness (Chaturvedi, 2000). Gayatri Spivak (1988) argued that researchers, knowledge producers, and practitioners ought to be constantly self-reflexive and self-critical when representing the West's Other (the Third World) and the Third World's Other (the subaltern). She points out that a profound responsibility lies with the intellectual when representing historically silenced subaltern voices (Spivak, 1988). This is particularly crucial to those intellectuals who are not from the same and/or similar locations and historically silenced backgrounds. Ilan Kapoor (2004) later insisted that researchers, knowledge producers, and practitioners must engage in an intimate and dialogical manner to move forward with this consciousness (Kapoor, 2004).

Driven by the same challenge and a politics of desire to produce knowledge from specific historical and ontological significances that are pushed to the margins, I use to analyse subaltern identities and how it influences the understanding of activist consciousness and locate the same in the context of politics of knowledge production from the Global South. By doing this, I expand the analytical categories that do not rely only on theories that are not indigenous to the experiences being analysed. Such perspectives help me understand particular activist experiences and powerful stories of resistance emerging in the post-war context of Northern Lanka and explore the nuanced insights they offer to theories and theorisations.

Women's experiences primarily determine much feminist literature on oppression and injustice. Citing Marilyn Frye's (1983) classic collection of essays *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, Khader (2015) defines oppression as a system of barriers that subordinates one group to another. An oppressive practice therefore has three features; namely, i) its objects must be targeted based on social group membership, ii) it must be part of a system or network of forces that work together to produce similar effects, and iii) subordination of the targeted group must be one of these effects (Khader, 2015).

The post-colonial and decolonial feminist literature provide profound insights into the legacy of differences within feminist movements and feminist understandings across locations, standpoints, and political ideologies to the history of colonisation (Mahmood, 2005; Mohanty, 1988; Paravisini-Gebert, 1997). Race, class, religion, generational variances, and the North-

South divisions influence social theorising. In her study of the Caribbean women's movement, for example, the decolonial theorist Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (1997) provides a critical overview of the extent of homogeneity through which Caribbean feminism is looked at and discussed, predominantly through the lens of Western feminism. For instance, one analysis focusing on race and class attempts to generalise all women in the region into one category. Paravisini-Gebert (1997) argues that relying on theories developed based on contexts outside of the Caribbean (mainly in the United States and Europe) has resulted in de-historicised interpretations of women's movements in the region. Hence, they fail to see the specificities of what constitutes feminism for the women of the Caribbean:

> There is a deceptive ease about generalisations; it is after all part and parcel of the academician's training to learn to draw general conclusions from the particular. Thus, I mean it less as an accusation than as a cautionary note, a reminder that the realities we seek to understand as scholars are often much larger than the scholarship we pursue, and that the understanding we offer is at times just approximation, theory based on various fragments of a changing truth. (Paravisini-Gebert, 1997, p. 3)

Paravisini-Gebert (1997) argues that the analytical lenses required to capture the nuances offered by the Caribbean women's movement are beyond the Western understanding of feminism. For instance, she points out that the depictions of female bodies – even metaphorically speaking in the language of feminism – emerge from an ever-present threat to their own bodies in the context of political systems where women's bodies have been continuously subjected to violence of various forms. This leads to specific interpretations of women's realities with symbolic constructs of political control over their bodies. Paravisini-Gebert (1997) argues that such an insight would be critical when conceptualising women's engagements with their own violated bodies and other similar bodies. While Paravisini-Gebert's work helped me explore Global South social activism and feminist consciousnesses without being limited by Western liberal thinking, I also believe that such insights help to expand the conceptual understanding towards plural feminisms even *within* the Global South. I follow the above-described critiquing traditions in the feminist literature by emphasising that researching activism located within the traditions and complexities of everyday lives needs a different set of analytical lenses other than the Western liberal ideologies in order to achieve conceptual innovation in the field.

The emergence of critiques of Western liberal thinking has helped us to think beyond the usual assumptions and generalisations made about activist movements from the Global South. The critiques have been around for decades and reflect and articulate the power structures by which activist feminist consciousness has been framed. Caribbean critiques like

Paravisini-Gebert's (1997) of Western theorisations that tend to over-generalise experiences of people of colour and other cultures elevate the subaltern voices and politics. Hence, based on activist experiences from certain locations and histories, my thesis cannot be viewed from a Western feminist perspective that primarily focuses on white women's experiences.

Deborah G. Martin, Susan Hanson, and Danielle Fontaine (2007) explore notions of women's activism through everyday connectedness, exploring the meanings of political activities by paying more attention to individuals in their daily lives. They focus on "the crucial role played by 'individuals embedded in communities' in shaping the social networks and relations necessary for social change", arguing that "these networks and relations that foster change begin in informal and localised interactions and may evolve into more formalised, institutional social movements" (Martin et al., 2007, p. 78). Their approach to activism focuses on individually created relations amongst social networks through a sense of interconnectedness. However, they keep the analytical fields open to capture different experiences in the processes of informal and localised interactions, which may or may not eventually evolve into movements or collectives (Martin et al., 2007). In this thesis, I explore this approach of everyday connectedness in a context where the actual connections are twisted and complicated by divisive and fractured legacies of violence. For instance, I consider the differences my activist participants negotiate to find common ground amongst themselves; how they organise beyond the legacy of differences; and how they negotiate unequal dynamics of their interpersonal relations to one another.

With the help of these questions, I explore how activism can be shaped by an evolving critical consciousness shared by the activists as a vision of a better future. It could also be a case of partially sharing a dream – not all aspects of it – due to their different identities and ideologies. Locating the Lankan case study in post-colonial and decolonial feminist literature, my thesis explores the possibilities and limitations (celebrations and frustrations) of social activism produced by the lives and voices of young activists who seek social justice in post-war Northern Lanka. Just as Saba Mahmood (2005) took the concept of agency outside pre-existing notions, I locate activist consciousness beyond its existing limitations by probing deeper into the experiences of young activists who develop complex relationships between social identities and political ideologies in a context where dealing with differences has profound impacts on communities.

Another exemplary feminist scholarship comes from Saba Mahmood (2005) who argues that the activism of the women's piety movement in Egypt challenges normative liberal

thinking that liberal desires are always free of any form of subordination. She gives examples of transformation influenced by the women's movements and the larger piety movement in Egyptian society. Mahmood (2005) also points out the risk of overseeing and/or excluding experiences such as those of the women's piety movement members if theorists stick to universalised normative liberal thinking that does not accommodate experiences outside the given and widely accepted frames of analyses. Similarly, she also questions the feminist theorising that tends to rely on such liberal concepts when defining feminism. For instance, she challenges the normative liberal assumption that human agency is primarily about challenging and resisting social norms (Mahmood, 2005).

Drawing on Foucault's conceptualisation of deconstructing subjects and sovereignty, Mahmood (2005) offers critical theoretical insights into the experiences of the women from the piety movement as subjects excluded from the trajectory of liberal modernity and its categorisations. Using Foucault's analysis of ethics to understand the key aspects of the movement, Mahmood challenges understandings of politics, ethics, and political subjects from the critical perspective of dominant liberal models, which have avoided self-reflection. For instance, she argues that a limited understanding of agency may suggest that it revolves around autonomy. Drawing on the research of Lila Abu-Lughod (1989, 1990) with Bedouin women, Mahmood (2005) argues that the concept of resistance needs to identify and understand different forms of power structures within and between practices. She shows that such an analysis helps us to move beyond the simple binary of the resistance and subordination nexus. Mahmood (2005) challenges the implication that identifying an act of resistance is relatively unproblematic or easy. She argues that while the notion of resistance gets expanded by locating it in fields of power (rather than outside of them), it does not accommodate experiences that are socially, ethically, or politically indifferent to the goal of opposing hegemonic norms (Mahmood, 2005).

Feminist scholarship that speaks to the populations on the margins also problematises the legacy of emerging differences when feminist identities intersect with ethnicity, class, caste, and religion (Crenshaw, 1991; Gines, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006). There is a wide range of literature critiquing the global shift towards neoliberal policies and their influences on feminist thinking and feminist organisations (see. e.g., Desai, 2005; Lindio-McGovern, 2007; Unnithan & de Zordo, 2018). Based in South Asia, Nivedita Menon (2012) argues that making gender a component of development has depoliticised the feminist critique of patriarchy and feminist critiques of 'development' and corporate globalisation. My thesis resonates with Menon's

(2012) argument that the depoliticisation of feminist politics calls for further exploration, especially in the Global South.

Lydia Alpízar Durán, Noël D. Payne, and Anahi Russo's (2007) edited volume documents voices from Latin America to Korea to describe different challenges faced by feminist movements and organisations. The essays address a range of issues such as challenging power and revisioning leadership, revisiting organisational practices, building organisational capacity and resources, broadening the support base of movements, and sustaining work in situations of conflict and campaigns as a means for movement building. They are primarily focused on conversations within activist spaces and organisational structures that have been addressing issues related to gender, women's rights, and feminisms. In some cases, these labels do not define or identify the spaces themselves (Durán et al., 2007).

Menon (2012) argues that a feminist understands that different identities are produced at different times and in different spaces because of certain gendered processes that produce hierarchies of dominant and subordinate rankings. A feminist consciousness, therefore, helps to understand social hierarchies and gendered processes across time and space (Menon, 2012). According to Menon (2012, p. 109), "All we are doing is finding new ways of addressing old challenges."

A related strain of feminist scholarship exemplified by Srila Roy (2012) points out that there is a gap when it comes to theoretical interventions from South Asia that revisit the dominant understandings of feminism and feminist politics by problematising the colonial and neoliberal influences, which she calls the 'institutionalisation of feminism'. Roy's (2012, p. 19) work revisits the dominant understandings of feminism and feminist politics in South Asia:

> It is our hope that new empirical developments in feminist activism that they map and the new theoretical challenges that these pose will prompt a rethinking and re-evaluation of established understandings of feminist politics, its spaces and subjects, at a moment of transformation, if not of crisis, in contemporary South Asia.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), meanwhile, criticises the Western feminist representations of Third World for i) the assumption of the category 'women' as already constituted, ii) methodologically averaging women to a common understanding, setting aside differences, and iii) empirical results are taken as analytical realities. Mohanty's work also highlights the need to think about terminological challenges. For instance, the terms 'feminism' and 'women's liberation' may not have equivalents (not just mere translations) available in every local language and context. Her work encouraged me to be critical of known feminist discourses and how to develop processes of identifying and acknowledging parallel discourses

that may not be identified by the known language of feminism (Mohanty, 1988). In this way, my thesis contributes to expanding the scope of feminist scholarship that accommodates experiences outside the West and on the margins of complex realities in the Global South.

Returning to Spivak (2004), she points out that the work that portrays the experiences of non-Western women within Western cultures challenges the sense of solidarity that Western feminists have long celebrated. According to her, this should not be treated as a threat; instead, it should be incorporated and celebrated as it allows enriching the understandings of social activism, women's struggles, and feminisms (Spivak, 2004).

In this thesis, I build on such traditions of critical feminist scholarship from the Global South and people of colour to identify tenets of the activist consciousness that help us to better understand oppressed and/or marginalised sections of society. For instance, I offer a discussion on how the intersections of various forms of oppression inform certain women's domination over other women in the Global South. Women from the Global South cannot be viewed as a uniform category who are all affected by the same kind of marginalisation (Mohanty, 1988; Paravisini-Gebert, 1997). The stereotype of the Global South, especially South Asia, as poor and culturally oppressed must be challenged. As a result, the nuances of women's experiences in terms of caste, religion, ethnicity, language, disability, and sexuality are often lost by this universal categorisation of women from the Global South. My thesis will bring out such nuances based on experiences that are often overlooked by such categorisations and offer insights for further research.

4.2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF FRAMING

In *Social Activism in Southeast Asia*, Michele Ford (2012) points out the flaws in new social movement theory, resource mobilisation theory, and political process theory – three different approaches to understanding contemporary social movements. According to Ford (2012), the conceptual understandings offered by these theories are shaped by their genesis in the experience of the industrialised, liberal democratic North. She also points out that even though the political process theory has evolved through its application in Latin America, the normative focus of this theory remains within liberal democratic experiences (Ford, 2012).

According to Ford (2012, p. 5), "The concept of framing has been extremely influential in the study of social movements." This concept resonates with the study of social activism in South Asia's authoritarian and semi-democratic contexts. Ford argues that framing provides a powerful tool for explaining why social activism within the broader framework of social

movements chooses to engage with a particular point of reference over others when describing their meanings and concerns. She includes examples such as a feminist movement in Singapore that uses certain kinds of framing to avoid unwanted attention from the (authoritarian or semi-democratic) government (Lyons, 2000, 2007) and the labour movement in New Order Indonesia (Ford, 2012).

The work of Angela Y. Davis (1981) offers remarkable insights into the intersections of women, race, and class. It emerges from strong Black feminist and leftist standpoints on oppression and marginalisation, echoing the subaltern standpoints that I explore in this thesis. Davis (1981) analyses the differences and similarities between the experiences of Black and white women across different classes. She shows that class oppression has been a powerful medium for both sexism and racism and that the patriarchal economic systems need to be challenged and destroyed in the fight to eradicate sexism and racism (Davis, 1981).

Inspired by such feminist scholarship, in this thesis I explore activist consciousnesses in processes and practices created by young activists to help them come together and work towards social change in post-ethnic war Lanka. With the help of my participants' profound insights on subaltern and feminist consciousnesses, I explore what feminism understands itself to be through these particular subaltern identities and struggles and how it gets shaped when young activists share a common platform beyond the legacies of differences that usually cause divisions. My goal in this chapter is to adopt and evolve theoretical frameworks developed with consciousness around epistemic violence and silencing in relation to the topic of this thesis (Dotson, 2011).

4.3 FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE QUESTION OF GENDER

The literature indicates that feminist consciousness has evolved around notions of gender and how gendered relations resulted in hierarchies influencing every aspect of society (Cooper, 1892; Lugones, 2008; Oyewumi, 1997). This body of scholarship is in dialogue with the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) that emphasises that gender relations cannot be limited to the understanding of the binary. Following this tradition of critical feminist scholarship, I expand the understanding of feminist consciousness into a cobweb of complex intersections of forms of oppression that shape the everyday lives of the subaltern. My thesis contributes to existing scholarship by theorising new lessons to be learnt through the experiences of addressing the legacy of differences (Mohammed, 2018).

Anna Julia Cooper (1892), who had been born into slavery in the United States in 1858 and lived until 1964, was problematising the question of gender as early as the late 19th century. As a woman school principal who promoted girls' education, she questioned the categories of women, class, race, secular party, freedom, and scope and universality of social movements in her writings. According to Cooper (1892, pp. 121–122),

> Woman's strongest vindication for speaking is that the world needs to hear her voice. . . . When race, color, sex, condition, are realized to be accidents, not the substance of life . . . then woman's lesson is taught and woman's lesson is won—not the white woman not the black woman nor the red woman, but the cause of every man or woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong.

Without being heard, the price of deculturation and assimilation for women would be painfully high, and they would be stripped of contextual validations (Cooper, 1892). Problematising the gendered sphere and moving beyond the coloniality of gender, as argued by Maria Lugones (2008), provides critical analytical tools for revisiting gender and feminist politics in the Global South.

In her study of the Igbo people of Nigeria, Nkiru Nzegwu (2006) argues that there is an implicit particularity to the categories of women and gender that theorists must take up to ask the question "Is gender inevitably foundational?" She argues that the answer is no for the Igbo people. Similarly, Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997) argues that identities are relational and bodily reasoning is a biological interpretation of the social world. Therefore, gender has been ontologically conceptualised as if it is foundational and determines everything else (Oyewumi, 1997).

Salma Lawrence (2015), meanwhile, argues that different temporalities based on gender disparities can co-exist, and this should be one of the crucial projects of decolonising feminism. She substantiates her arguments based on her ethnographic fieldwork on witchcraft, sorcery, and violence in a matrilineal community of Melanesia. The coloniality of communities also makes it necessary to explore who gets to define the space, who can occupy it, how it is monitored and by whom, if one is to be innovative in one's theoretical interventions (Lawrence, 2015).

The work of Meena Gopal (2015) problematises how gendered realities are approached and understood. She offers an academic exercise of questioning the relevance of conceptual categories, especially when dealing with experiences and voices on the margins of multiple oppressions. Gopal (2015, p. 77) profoundly challenges the "urgency to theorise in response to global debates".

With such theoretical innovations and directions in mind, I continue to search for analytical tools that enhance our ability to see, understand, and conceptualise the complex interpersonal relationships shaping feminist consciousness through social activism in the everyday lives of young activists who come together across differences to collaborate in their work for a common social goal. I then evolve the conceptual frameworks to understand the underlying processes of organising together around a direct issue while indirectly, albeit powerfully, addressing the legacy of differences in Lanka.

I will be making a conceptual intervention in locating activist, feminist consciousness and feminist understandings of activism from a particular subaltern context of the Global South across generations and ideologies – its strengths, limitations, contours, and textures. With the support of post-colonial, subaltern, and decolonial feminist thinking, I explore how we interpret the actions of young activists who challenge the gender binary by not directly confronting the dominant social constructions of gender in Northern Lanka. Can there be gendered spheres that are not oppressed? Could male dominance and male violence be challenged by other realities of gendered bodies where different spheres are not oppressed? Does Lankans' limited knowledge of gendered spheres reflect the kind of skewed vested interests imposed on us by colonisers and hegemonic ideologies such as patriarchy and heteronormativity?

4.4 Activist Consciousness Evolving from Historicised, Contextualised, and Generational Feminisms

The language of feminism and feminist activism have offered analytical tools to locate and understand activism. They are profoundly historicised and contextualised to a specific geopolitical location and are often generationally interconnected. Exploring how home-grown feminisms (Roces, 2010) are produced is vital, especially given the conceptual and political gaps within knowledge production from specific locations, such as the Global South.

In the context of South Asia, theoretical frameworks that help to understand the sociology of societies must consider their struggles against a backdrop of intensified religious fundamentalism. In Lanka, a brutal civil war and Buddhist fundamentalism nearly destroyed the fabric of society (Jayawardena & de Alwis, 1996); in India, we are seeing the extreme right-wing politics based on Hinduism/Hindutva (Chaudhuri, 2004). The analysis of my study follows the theoretical trajectory of understanding how bodies and identities are gendered and sexualised and must be analysed in the light of historically contextualised struggles against hegemonic powers.

In South Asia, our ancestors fought for our independence from the colonial powers. The fight is still ongoing on so many other reasons. One of which is localised forms of power struggles and authoritarianism – such as the Lankan state that hegemonies a violent interpretation of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism (Fernando, 2017). Women's bodies and reproductive functions get instrumentalised in this process of hegemonisation. As eminent Lankan feminist scholars Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis (1996, pp. 162) observe,

> As we well know, such spectacular 'moments' of violence are merely the tip of the iceberg; what lies submerged is a long history of complex human relationships imbricated in a constantly shifting nexus of power. This history is of pressing concern for feminists since fundamentalism naturalises and sacralises the family and sexuality and secludes women from the public sphere. Fundamentalism uses women's bodies as a battlefield in its struggle to appropriate institutional power, and is therefore a political phenomenon.

According to Jayawardena (2009), the motivation for *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* was the fact that many in Asia and the Middle East are not aware that their countries have a history of active feminism and that they have incipient movements of women's emancipation that are supported both by women and men. She traces the histories of such movements from 11 countries, namely Egypt, Iran, Turkey, India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Jayawardena shows that the little-known histories of various women's movements in Asia and the Middle East from the 19th century need to be made visible with the understanding of the nature and content of feminist history. She argues that those who want to keep the women of their societies in these countries subordinated, oppressed, and exploited by patriarchal structures conveniently dismiss feminism as a foreign ideology, and she argues with the support of empirical evidence that this is not the case. Instead, struggles for women's emancipation and national liberation movements have been part of the national histories of these countries for centuries. Jayawardena points out that the histories depicted in school textbooks on national revolutionary and democratic movements do not give adequate attention to women's participation in these movements. Nor are there many instances of mentioning women's movements for emancipation in the textbooks (Jayawardena, 2009). Jayawardena then offers a working definition based on her extensive empirical study:

> The meaning of the word has now been expanded to mean an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation within the family, at work and in society, and conscious action by women (and men) to change this situation. Feminism, in this definition, does go beyond movements for equality and emancipation which agitate for equal rights and legal reforms to redress the prevailing discrimination against women. While such movements often advance the struggle for equality, they do not tackle such basic issues

> as women's subordination within the family or challenge the existing framework of men-women relations in which the subordination of women is located. In this study, the word 'feminism' is used in its larger sense, embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change the system. (2009, pp. 2–3)

Jayawardena's work assisted me to locate my thesis within innovative thinking. First, her research entails an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in different spaces; for example, within the family structure and outside this structure – in the community at large. The openness and fluidity of these categories could be shaped and deepened. Second, Jayawardena calls for conscious action by women *and* men to change the situation of women's oppression and exploitation. Third, Jayawardena brings out different forms of silencing around women's activism – systematised mainly by the governments – and shows what needs to be done in future studies of women's movements beyond the limitations of her own. She ends by promoting an intersectional analysis of women's activism that captures the influences of class, caste, ethnicity, and race aspects of our societies and locates women's oppression and exploitation within these extended categories of analysis. Working within conceptual spaces inspired by such feminist scholarship inspired my own innovative contributions to theory and practice.

Other South Asian feminist scholars, such as Kamla Bhasin and Nighat Khan (2004), argue that no single definition of feminism is applicable at all times. They show that understandings of feminism have been changing and evolving because "feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and action" (Bhasin & Khan, 2004, pp. 4–5). Their work complements what Jayawardena (2009) suggested above as a broad definition of feminism, one accepted by women from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in recent South Asian workshops: that it comprises an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at work and within the family; and conscious action by women and men to change this situation (Bhasin & Khan, 2004). According to Bhasin and Khan (2004, pp. 4–5), this definition includes "anyone who recognises the existence of sexism (discrimination based on gender), male domination and patriarchy and who takes some action against it, is a feminist". In other words, as they point out, the mere recognition of sexism is not enough. It has to be followed by an action that challenges male domination. This is now pretty much established knowledge amongst most feminists from the South Asian region, as they have been constructively sharing their work and experiences.

In a volume of essays on contemporary Indian feminism edited by Maitrayee Chaudhuri (2004), feminism is discussed in the context of India's culture, society, and politics. The contributors' approach towards women's activism and women's movements is located within the larger project of consolidating secularism and democracy in India. They also explore colonial influences and the development of feminist consciousness in independent India and the challenges to feminism posed by globalisation and extreme right-wing politics (Hindutva) (Chaudhuri, 2004).

In her analysis of contemporary feminist movements in India, Menon (2012, p. 222) notes:

> Feminism is not about that moment of final triumph, but about the gradual transformation of the social field so decisively that old markers shift forever. This shift is what enables many young women today to say, 'I believe in equal rights for women, but I'm not a (shudder!) feminist.'

Menon (2012) offers an understanding of feminist politics that acknowledges that feminist struggles need to identify new energies emerging from different class, caste, and sexuality positions that constantly challenge and transform the feminist field.

On a different but connected note, in *Recasting Women*, editors Kukkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid show how Indian colonial history bears significant responsibility for the present-day reconstitution of patriarchies in Northern India. They argue that "the exiting anti-women practices are not feudal remnants alone that will vanish in time but are products of a sustained reformulation of patriarchies" (Sangari & Vaid, 2006, p. 25). Similarly, Menon (2012) is speaking of new contestations of patriarchy and contestations of normative feminism when she suggests that new energies need to be explored within the fields of feminism.

Firstly, these arguments help me understand that colonial histories play a significant role in shaping Lankans' present-day beliefs and practices, including feminism and the production and reproduction of women's oppression. Secondly, they afforded the realisation that I need to look beyond simplistic readings if I am to be open to discovering the constructive contributions that social activism in post-war justice movements brings to feminisms and the existing knowledge and analytical tools to understand the same.

For instance, another inspiring feminist body of work comes from the experiences of women who use their conventionally gendered identities in peace activism. De Alwis (1997) argues that women who were part of the movement called the Mothers' Front used maternal suffering as their weapon to fight against the military to free their sons and male relatives who either got arrested or were disappeared by the armed forces. However, they did not sit at home

and wait for the release of their families. Instead, they militantly marched on the streets confronting the Sri Lankan state (de Alwis, 1997). Similarly, members of the Women in Black movement in Latin America have creatively played with their identity of motherhood to bring light to their activism (Menon, 2012).

In her ethnographical study of queer activism in North India, Naisargi N. Dave (2012) proposes two approaches to activism. The first relates to the enormous possibility of influencing a new social world that is in the making as activism unfolds; the second explores how the sense of closure of potential is seemingly realised and answered. She locates her arguments within the radical emergence of these two crucial aspects of potential and closure, arguing that

> activism is ethical practice, an effect of three affective exercises: the problematisation of social norms, the invention of alternatives to those norms, and the creative practice of these newly invented possibilities. In other words, I theorise activism as critique, inventions, and creative practice. (Dave, 2012, p. 3)

For Dave, limitations are the very condition of possibility for once unthinkable social emergences – like queer activism in India. The central question her work explores is: Why are activists, activists? Her ethnographic work with queer activists in Delhi helped her to theorise activism as an *ethical* practice, and she elaborates that activists act because they share collective ethical ideals of a better world. Together, they share a vision of what a better world could look like. They operate in various contexts – including ones in conflict. However, the shared ethical ideals of a better world with the possibility of justice become the basis for their shared desires. That is the driving force that brings them together. Using various conceptualisations of ethics and ethical practice, she further develops the concept in relation to activism that she was exposed to in Northern India (Dave, 2012). I draw upon her work in my own ethnographic research and analysis.

In a study of foreign domestic workers in Singapore, Lenore Lyons (2007, p. 111) explores a women's group that adopts a cautious and conservative approach to its activities:

> Issues of sexuality, including the rights of lesbians; religion and the role of Shariah Law; and class-based social divisions are all designated as off-limits. In deciding whether to identify itself as "feminist" openly, AWARE [Association of Women for Action and Research] has been confronted with public/media perceptions of feminists as man-haters, lesbians, and "radicals" and with the political association with feminism with encroaching "Western values."

After a decade of its existence, the members of AWARE had become less rigid towards *feminism* and were showing a willingness to describe the association as *feminist*: "By this, they mean a political commitment to gender equity for all" (Lyons, 2007, p. 111). In other words,

they wanted to explore differences between ideology-based identities – in this case, feminism/feminist – mainly at two levels, the individual and collective. Interestingly, the identity of the collective divides into two critical aspects. One is the identity known as the official voice of AWARE, which is the public face of the collective. The other is the identity for institutional references known as the institutional face, which is limited to its members and supporters only. "It is a feminism which has delivered some of its 'radical' potential, but which is inevitably supportive of the state's own social vision, precisely *because* it is a vision which middle-class women share" (Lyons, 2000, p. 3).

In the context of Singapore, Lyons (2007) explores the strategic choices made by AWARE in relation to a feminist identity in a hostile political environment. She argues that the everyday practices of 'Asian feminists' are a product of constant negotiations with complex meanings of feminism for activists' personal and political lives. Lyons (2007) points out that class elements that determine the rhetoric and practice of nationalist struggle play an essential role in how feminist identities are shaped and associated in Singapore. By studying the experiences of AWARE – which she describes as both feminist and non-feminist – Lyons (2007) has shown how the negotiations of a range of identities associated with feminism have been successful in producing multiple discourses around civic responsibility, Westernisation, multiculturalism, and women's rights.

Western influences, according to Lyons (2000), also limit any attempts to redefine feminism according to Asian values in the context where the state intervention in altering political values according to Western and Asian values. In other words, any experience of transition and/or transformation of feminist ideologies or feminisms is not easy when the local context's complexities determine the transition and/or transformation process. Thus, Lyons (2000, p. 20) concludes that the feminist identity is "built on contingency and compromise".

In the volume of essays *Women's Movements in the Global Era*, editor Amrita Basu (2010) joins several other scholars in arguing that even under widely different conditions, women's movements have successfully addressed violence against women. However, they have also been much less successful in challenging class inequalities (Basu, 2010). The volume's insights come from empirical studies from 16 countries across the world locating women's activism in the global context, within the state, and concerning other social movements and civil societies. The issues covered include violence against women, political rights and representation, sexual minorities, and poverty and class inequality. As noted by Basu (2010), feminism has been the overarching theme. Feminist thinking and activist involvements constantly inform each other, and one must always pay attention to the specificities that each

location brings and activist experiences within such locations when using their voices to theorise. The contributors highlight both the celebrations and limitations of social activism and reveal exciting platforms of relationality among young activists despite their diverse locations (Basu, 2010).

The edited collection *Women's Movements in Asia* (Roces, 2010) locates women's activism within feminism and transnational activism. Mina Roces starts by asking, "Is there such a thing as Asian feminism?" She also acknowledges that Asian women activists have disliked the word 'feminism' as it is largely associated with Western feminism. She describes how Asian activists who sought to engage with international feminism faced criticism at home for mimicking Western thoughts and ideas: "Asian women activists responded to this fundamental challenge by producing their own brand of 'home-grown' feminism" (Roces, 2010, p. 2).

The volume reveals how feminist activism is related to national and international advocacy and policy changes, trafficking, migration, gender rights, and transnational networking across borders. Further, the national and transnational aspects of feminist activism from the Asian region show activists' openness to building alliances across borders and the strength that such alliances bring to the idea of transnational feminism (Roces, 2010). Both these publications – with a focus on the world and Asia, respectively – broaden the feminist framework to better understand women's activism. My work addresses this critical tradition exploring what feminism means in different contexts and how it is contested and shaped by meanings that young activists envision and produce through their activism for social changes and transformations.

In their study of the women's movement in Malaysia, Cecilia Ng, Maznah Mohamad, and tan beng hui (2006) provide the following background:

> In Malaysia, Muslim intellectuals in the 1930s, educated and influenced by the reform movements in the Middle East, demanded Muslim women's right to education. The Malay Women Teachers' Union, founded in 1929, encouraged formal schooling for Malay women. Sexual molestation and harassment of female estate workers were already key issues for protest action in the late 1930s in Selangor and again in 1950, this time in Perak.

Acknowledging that feminism could mean different things and may or may not be accepted by all people who operate with an idea of feminism, the authors refer to a 'plurality of feminisms' (Ng et al., 2006). They point out that numerous types of feminism can be distinguished by frameworks of analysis, practices, and strategies.

Early on in their study, Ng et al. (2006) make two points. First, that the understanding of feminism within the women's movement in Malaysia has changed, and that it is necessary to explore a plurality of feminisms. Second, feminist theories – including liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, and postmodern feminism – lack multicultural contexts, especially from the complex contexts faced by countries from the Global South. Ng et al. (2006) locate the autonomous women's movement in Malaysia in the context of an ethnically fragmented, post-colonial, and authoritarian society, showing that despite the challenges emerging from such contexts, the women's movement successfully carries out its political struggles that have provided the platform for new issues to be discussed in public spheres by confronting a conventionally authoritarian state. The authors argue that different historical contexts formed the backdrop for the emergence of one dominant form of feminist expression and agency over all others. They argue that such a way of contextualising their study has helped them locate four different types of feminism that offer dynamism based on Malaysia's complex contexts: nationalist, social, political, and market-driven feminism (Ng et al., 2006).

I draw on such feminist scholarship to make sense of narratives from multicultural societies that have experienced multiple oppressions due to a history of colonisations, ethnic war, and various forms of violence and marginalisation to offer understandings of feminisms as articulated by young activists. It is evident that notions of feminism assist in understanding activisms aimed at challenging sex-, gender-, and sexuality-based oppressions. There are certain aspects of feminism that speak to the experiences of young activists. However, it is also evident that certain other aspects of their activism oppose notions of feminisms, especially those based on Western liberal notions. As illustrated above, the different theoretical approaches to the study of social activism generate many questions relevant to my thesis. The everyday connectedness among activists opens the discussion to explore ideological connections and contradictions to social activism, including feminist ideologies. Localised forms of activism show the need to understand these different forms beyond the pre-existing categories of analysis, such as traditional gendered articulations of everyday lives, struggles, and activism. My thesis addresses these concerns.

4.5 FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AS CRITIQUING NORMATIVE PRACTICES

A conceptual engagement that guided this research comes from the feminist philosopher Serene Khader (2015). Following the tradition of critically reflecting on existing

feminist theorisations, Khader questions the assumption that traditions are inherently patriarchal. She argues that this very assumption is a product of liberal feminist thinking. This thread of critical thinking is also related to some other critical feminist scholarship I was inspired by (Okin, 1989; Wadud, 1999) and heavily draw on (Abu-Lughod, 2002; hooks, 1989, 2009; Mahmood, 2005). Based on decolonial thinking, Khader (2015) highlights the need for feminism to oppose imperialism and opposes the feminist normative critiques against tradition. She argues that a critique of women's oppression needs to show a much greater degree of respect for traditions and religious beliefs than is often seen in the existing relevant literature and that feminism and tradition could in fact co-exist:

> I argue that feminism and traditionalism are not necessarily at odds with one another. The view that they are arises from a mistaken sense that the inheritedness of practices determines their oppressiveness to women. The mistaken view that externally dictated practices are inherently objectionable stems from a value I call "Enlightenment freedom". I show that, though both liberal and anti-imperialist feminist theorists connect feminism to Enlightenment freedom, the link is conceptually unnecessary. I propose that feminism is opposition to sexist oppression and that the oppressiveness of practices stems from their having certain objectionable effects – irrespective of their perceived origin. (Khader, 2015, p. 2)

Khader (2015) critiques the unnecessary conceptual linkage some theorists often make between feminism and Enlightenment freedom. By exploring various ways of keeping this critical perspective alive, she suggests nurturing conceptual space for traditionalist feminism (Khader, 2015). I follow the same tradition of critical feminist thinking to locate feminist consciousness that is not limited by Western liberal thought. I argue that feminist consciousnesses from the Global South are shaped by activists' everyday struggles that are constantly changing and evolving as they navigate precarious living due to multiple forms of marginalisation. It is a messy process. The intersectional aspects that shape their consciousness keep evolving and building on one another as they fight discrimination and work towards change. I show that feminist consciousness from the Global South brings out previously unexplored understandings of consciousness that are not rooted in or validated by Western thought. Hence, we need different questions, approaches, and analytical tools to capture them.

The work of Spivak (2004) on human rights discourses, education of the rural poor, and the class and race divisions spread across the North-South divide. Spivak calls this class division an 'epistemic discontinuity' where the rural poor in the South is represented by non-government workers who aim to obtain aid from the North using a combination of episteme and ethical discourses to be persuasive enough for the taste of the North. The rural poor are not adequately educated in such a process. As a result, she argues that they become the ill-educated

rural poor. My earlier analysis has also shown that the category of rural poor needs to be distinguished.

For instance, Dalit women in Lanka will have different experiences than rural women who live in poverty. The access to resources will significantly differ between the rural poor and those on the margins of multiple forms of discrimination/oppression. According to Spivak (2004, p. 527), "This discontinuity, not skin color or national identity crudely understood, undergirds the question of who always rights and who is perennially wronged." Spivak is concerned about the discontinuity between the Southern human rights advocates and those whom they think they protect. In other words, she problematises the gap between the people (the rural poor, as she argues) who are supposed to benefit from human rights programmes and the ones who hold power in every community who could offer the kind of human rights-based assistance to the people who need them.

Many feminist and indigenous scholars from interdisciplinary backgrounds have critiqued the relevance of a human rights framework (Grewal, 2015). For Spivak (2004), education is one area where this gap could be addressed – especially the kind she refers to as new, in which the established hierarchical patterns of human rights discourses should be questioned. A well-thought-through historical and theoretical digression approach leads Spivak to substantiate that global human rights activities of this era are applying a crude notion of cultural differences. She deconstructs cultural relativism from the natural rights perspective applied to all human beings. Spivak (2004) gives examples of the pedagogy of the subaltern – with a conscious focus on subalterns as those removed from lines of social mobility. She insists that "the work of an epistemic undoing of cultural relativism as cultural absolutism can only work as a supplement to the more institutional practice, filling a responsibility shaped gap but also adding something discontinuous" (Spivak, 2004, p. 532).

Drawing on Spivak's work, I apply the epistemic undoing of cultural relativism as cultural absolutism whereby the kind of expectations institutionalised in women's activism resulted in dominant narratives of feminisms or, on the contrary, opposition to a feminist identity, which is often found in institutionalised women's activism (Menon, 2004; Roy, 2012). My thesis is the first to explore notions of feminist consciousness that interrogate the epistemic undoing of cultural relativism and absolutism in Lanka.

I explore how activists begin to be critical of known discourses and how we develop processes of identifying and acknowledging parallel discourses that may not be identified by the known and/or hegemonic interpretations and languages. For instance, I emphasise the need to think about terminological challenges. As noted above, the terms 'feminism' and 'women's

liberation' or 'emancipation' may not have equivalents (not just mere translations) available in every local language and context (Mohanty, 1988). Another example is that a feminist critique of religion would become a theological question, which would need to be looked at from critical theology perspectives to enable substantiated claims that are not merely discursive pretexts.

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed (2017) emphasises the creation of feminist theory using her ordinary everyday life experiences of being a feminist in different social spheres occupied and challenged. She draws on the legacies and scholarship of feminists of colour to argue that feminists often become estranged from aspects of the world that they critique with the hope of transforming them by creating inventive solutions and sustaining the same (Ahmed, 2017). I build on Ahmed's (2017) contribution to feminist theory by exploring the tenets of feminist consciousness that evolve through processes of critiquing normative practices, including the prescriptive nature of how to be a feminist that does not consider the contexts and historical elements of oppression. For instance, I ask the following questions to explore the nuances that intersecting forms of oppression offer to deepen our understanding of feminist consciousness: How do young activists broaden their conception of inequality and oppression? What is their relationship with groups/collectives that work on different forms of oppression?

In her foreword to *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India* by the Sangtin Writers Collective and Richa Nagar (2006), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2006) situates herself within this scholarly work as a sister-traveller connected through a sense of shared feminist politics and vision for collective knowledge production, solidarity, and accountability. As she points out, the book makes two major contributions to feminist thought:

> It enacts and theorises experience, storytelling, and memory work as central in the production of knowledge of resistance, and it offers a much-needed critique of colonialist discourses of development linked to donor-driven non-governmental organisation (NGO) projects of empowerments in the Third World/South. (Mohanty, 2006, p. ix)

The book brings out the personal and political struggles of nine women in the form of a collective journey using the technique of autobiographical narrative. They speak of their collective journey to build solidarity, reciprocity, and friendship across class, caste, and religious differences in the profoundly hierarchical world of rural Uttar Pradesh in India. Their narratives of negotiating between donor-driven Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) politics and the inherited intricacies of gender, caste, class, and regional inequalities speak directly to the group of activists I engaged with in my research. These activists are also reflected

in a collection of essays written by activists from the North and East of Lanka based on their experiences of activism in their respective regions, which includes the elements of violent conflict and war-related consequences (Saroor, 2014).

The way Mohanty (2006) connects her work on transnational feminisms to the work of the Sangtin Writers Collective and Richa Nagar inspired me and nurtured my own curiosity to explore women's activism based on experiences, which are the heart and soul of the activism itself. According to Mohanty (2006, p. xiv), "The coming together of feminists from different locations within a transnational alliance allows new imaginings of globalisation, difference, development, and social justice." Mohanty (2006, p. xiv) continues:

> In my own work on transnational feminism, I speak about solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and common interests anchoring the relationships among diverse communities, I argue that solidarity is always an achievement and that feminist solidarity continues the most ethical ways to cross borders. I believe that this notion of solidarity rather abstract notions of global sisterhood provides a vision of cross-border alliance.

Later, she connects the aspects of solidarity that she argues for, which emerges from the experiences of shared interests based on feminist relationships, with what is proposed by Nagar and her collaborators, that "class privilege and the professionalisation of NGOs and development work lead to compromising radical political agendas, and they conclude that a feminist vision that the activists cannot operationalise in their own communities is not a usable feminism for the collective" (Mohanty, 2006, p. xv). Such a formulation of feminist understandings of activism helped me add a transnational aspect to my thesis by locating my discussions amongst conceptual frameworks that provide the platform for new imaginations.

The critical perspectives of activism offered by the Sangtin activists through their engagements with Nagar speak to the kind of relationship between the researcher and the researched that I wished to build. In this way, I hoped to be able to weave out critical discussions of social activism from specific locations and histories, such as those of subalternity. Connecting their critical engagements and discussions that followed such engagements could also be related to the kind of feminist consciousness-building activism that Jayawardena (2009) identifies. I explore this connection further in the analysis presented in Part III. Also, locating my thesis in such a diverse body of literature on feminist thought and activism – that also contributes to differentiating the two like the work of the Sangtin activists – I envision the journey of my thesis as exploring the unexplored articulations of activism in post-war social justice movements in Lanka.

Simultaneously, I continue to nurture my interest in the inadequacy of existing terminology for articulating notions as lived and practised through the available analytical tools. Feminist understandings of oppression articulated by the experiences of women from different linguistic backgrounds should be foundational in transnational feminisms. However, this also raises the question of how we think of feminisms in relation to interpretations of other factors or relations. In other words, how much pluralism can feminism accommodate? Indeed, there could be different ways of addressing this concern. I offer this thesis as one way of addressing it by seriously engaging with ideas of feminisms that emerge from Global South social activism.

A final example of questioning the Western liberal ways of understanding feminisms comes from the work of Shay Welch. In her book *Existential Eroticism* (2015), she conducts a feminist analysis of women's oppression-perpetuating choices. As pointed out by one reviewer, "Welch maintains that the victim/wrongdoer dichotomy presents an oversimplified moral analysis of women's choices under patriarchy" (Isaacs, 2016). I connect Welch's call for the need to move beyond the victim/wrongdoer dichotomy to Spivak's (2004) encouragement to look out for deeper explanations – even in the absence of already established analytical categories. This would mean moving beyond the dichotomy between being a feminist and not in the context of my thesis. Following the methodology applied by Welch (2015), my thesis also brings philosophical analysis and non-normative lived experiences together in a way that focuses beyond simplified processes of meaning-making of women's activism. Welch (2015) stresses the non-normative lived experiences of women as these tend to be misunderstood by feminists.

The above review of the literature emphatically demonstrates that global politics and knowledge production still predominantly centre around the experiences of the Global North (Connell, 2008). Experiences from the Global South have often been regarded as not credible knowledge. People of colour, feminists and queer theorists, critical thinkers, and activists from the Global South have been challenging this inequality for a very long time. Intellectual movements such as subaltern studies and decolonisation studies emphasise the history of resistance to colonisation and oppression within and between communities. Publications such as 'The Global South' (Dados & Connell, 2012) and *Southern Theory* (Connell, 2008) offer profound insights into decolonial thinking and scholarship in the social sciences. For instance, Raewyn Connell (2008, p. x) argues that "when the claim of universal knowledge or universal values is made from a position of privilege, it is likely to serve hegemony not liberation". My thesis substantiates these claims by focusing on activists' experiences from the Global South I

order to accentuate historical aspects of marginalisation and/or oppression based on geopolitical relations of power, alongside the ethos of my vested standpoint reflected through the dilemma of an insider/outsider paradigm.

In summary, the findings of this literature review encouraged me to approach the experiences of social activism without narrowing them down to specific frameworks based on Western feminist thinking and/or hegemonic practices within the subaltern context.

PART III

WEAVING THE MAT OF ACTIVIST CONSCIOUSNESS: CONTOURS, COLLABORATIONS, CRITIQUING PRACTICES, AND CELEBRATIONS

> Perhaps one day, a compilation of data that points at an advanced civilisation, will settle us in a historically superior status and the multiple facts already available will become common knowledge. I hope that in the future, the people of this island will recognise that we have even more to be proud of. And finally that we give credence to the unshakeable oral tradition from the whole Asian region which, proclaims that Ravana, the King of Lanka, had indeed ruled an advanced civilisation. (Jayewardene, 2017, p. 103)

I begin the analysis part of my study with a quote from the 2017 book by Sunela Jayewardene titled *The Line of Lanka: Myths and Memories of an Island*, which offers critical and alternative historical and archaeological perspectives on knowledge traditions and practices of knowing from the land of Lanka. Jayewardene's book inspired me to foster the practice of tirelessly searching and continually adding to knowledge production in the face of challenges to the acknowledgement and validation of knowledge from particular locations, histories, decolonial thinking, and de-/re-politicisation in post-war healing and rebuilding.

I show that activists' experiences profoundly shape their activism and their understandings of consciousness beyond the binary, of intersectional marginalisation, and of the concept of positive change. Driven by the search for knowledge that has not been recognised and/or articulated as credible, Chapters 5–8 weave a metaphorical mat of activist consciousness based on activists' experiences of navigating everyday struggles and how they create processes to work towards positive changes. I will be weaving this mat using the various threads of reactions, reflections, actions, and engagements that emerged from the narratives of seven activists from Northern Lanka. My research participants come from a mixed background in terms of sex, gender, sexuality, class, caste, religion, education, geopolitical location, history of displacement, and ethnicity. Their stories unfold as I weave the mat. As the weaving progresses across the four chapters of Part III, their stories progress from introductions to insightful illuminations on what can be learnt from these remarkable activists' lives.

As noted in Chapter 3, the interviews for this thesis were all conducted in Tamil. I then transcribed the audio recordings before translating them into English. When I quote from the interviews, the activists' words are presented unedited to preserve their unique voices. For this reason, the grammar and syntax might not always follow English-language norms. I work with their experiences from a deep place of respect, gratitude, connectedness, and an acute awareness that the process of meaning-making on the part of the researcher should not diminish the depth of what was shared in trust and with hope for change. All research participants commented that they see every opportunity – such as the interview for the purpose of my thesis – as the seeding of self-reflection and the chance to move forward with renewed ideas and

energy. The extensive analytical frameworks elaborated in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 helped identify emerging themes, which I call 'threads of consciousness' – that is, awakenings that allow my participants to identify injustices, collaborations, imaginaries of justice, and positive critiquing practices. The four chapters of Part III provide a general outline of the metaphorical mat. The subsequent chapters provide an in-depth analysis of each emerging theme.

I use the metaphor of weaving a mat for several reasons. First, mat weaving practices have traditionally been the province of women and women-identifying people from a particular class in Lanka. My participants came from different parts of Lanka and cross ethnicities, languages, and religions. Second, mats have been part of many collaborative journeys of activism; I have sat on mats during discussions or meetings and slept on mats before or after discussions or meetings. Third, mats have been used as a tool in cultural and social activism addressing discriminatory practices and unequal treatments, such as by women weavers who promote coexistence and peacebuilding between communities of different ethnicities and religions. Activists have also used mats as a form of art produced to innovatively engage with the ideas of justice, especially for those who have been directly affected by discrimination and/or marginalisation. Examples of such activists include women affected by domestic and/or sexual violence, women of displaced families, environmental justice movements, and women affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (de Mel et al., 2009; Divakalala, 2005, 2007, 2009; Divakalala & Rajany, 2010; Saroor, 2014).

The intertwined threads of mats symbolise the complex intersection of textures, colours, and contours of everyday activism and the concept of change. Finally, I use the metaphor as a non-intrusive and non-threatening way of telling the stories of activists. In this way, the voices of my interviewees are not drowned in academic language and their essence is preserved. The exercise of weaving a mat embodies the mindfulness of the researcher and the choices made in the design of the research. My priority was to illuminate insights with the consciousness of subaltern voices and the politicisation of making sense of the same (Spivak, 1988). The activists interviewed for this research are credible knowers and knowledge producers (Addelson, 1993; Alcoff & Potter, 1993) who have profoundly guided my thinking and shaped my analysis of their activism. They also inspire me to develop theoretical innovations by sharpening my focus on subaltern experiences with the matrix of power (Collins, 1990; Spivak, 1988). My analysis reveals these activists to be profoundly intersectional (Combahee River Collective, 1979).

Each thread of the metaphorical mat was woven based on the interaction between activists' experiences and the theoretical framework outlined in the introductory chapters of this thesis. As this interaction progresses, the conceptual engagement expands where I introduce new concepts that help to interpret activists' experiences insightfully. Each main thread of consciousness is explored in its own chapter in Part III. Understanding the power dynamics behind everyday examples of discrimination and marginalisation has been instrumental in identifying the threads of consciousness. In the same vein, feminist and subaltern theories and scholarly contributions have helped to significantly unpack the nuances of the transcripts and highlight contributions to theory and practice. For instance, the insights from generating an epistemic standpoint from a subaltern perspective (Spivak, 1988), a strong Dalit feminist consciousness to fight against injustices (Baisantry, 1999; Gidla, 2017), and the power relations within and between different marginalised groups (Harding, 1987) have helped me to identify complex hierarchies as intertwined systems of oppression, including multifaceted structural violence, and to explore the threads of consciousness that characterise these systems (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Weber, 2010).

The metaphorical mat that I weave contextualises the voices and experiences of activists in their daily being, processing, and doing. The aim is to lay out a general understanding of where these voices and experiences come from so as to better contextualise them. Every thread of the mat contains complex nuances that might challenge the dominant views on people's narratives from certain locations and histories. Keeping this in mind, I provide as much information as possible within the scope of this thesis to construct a comprehensive understanding. This understanding evolves with each chapter of Part III, and I also provide many references to relevant scholarly literature to help those who wish to explore specific themes, concepts, and/or areas. I weave this metaphorical mat in the hope that it will provide readers with profound insights. I weave it with the aim of quenching my thirst – and the thirsts of my participants and readers – for knowledge from a particular location with a particular history.

One of the conceptual inspirations that nurture my analysis comes from the work of Naisargi N. Dave (2012). In her ethnographical study of queer activism in North India, Dave proposes two approaches to activism. The first should seek to harness the enormous possibility of influencing a new social world that is in the making, and the second seeks a sense of closure whereby potential is seemingly realised and answered. Dave (2012) theorises activism as the radical emergence of these two crucial aspects of potential and closure. According to Dave (2012, p. 3),

> Activism is ethical practice, an effect of three affective exercises: the problematisation of social norms, the invention of alternatives to those norms, and the creative practice of these newly invented possibilities. In other words, I theorise activism as critique, inventions, and creative practice.

Dave (2012) argues that limitations are the very condition of possibility for once-unthinkable social emergences – like queer activism in India. The important questions explored in her work include: Why are activists, activists? and Why do activists act? Using conceptualisations of ethics and ethical practice, Dave (2012) argues that activists act because they share collective ethical ideals of a better world. Together, they share a vision of what a better world could look like. They operate in various contexts – including those that are in conflict with each other. However, the shared ethical ideals of a better world with the possibility of justice form the basis for their shared desires. That is the driving force that brings them together (Dave, 2012). The findings of my thesis resonate with Dave's theorisation of activism. Each thread of consciousness portrays components of activism as ethical practices and weaves into how they are performed.

The histories, specific geopolitical locations, struggles, and legacies of activists who navigate multiple forms of marginalisation on a daily basis require analytical lenses that take these nuances into account (Divakalala, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2014). For this reason, I apply Dave's (2012) theorisation of activism as critique, invention, and creative practice to illuminate the experiences of activists from Northern Lanka. Each thread of consciousness woven into this thesis takes this lens into account and reveals more insights as the analysis evolves. The theme of building communities together emerges from my analysis of the experiences of activists who work tirelessly and often overlook their own wellbeing. Their lives are deeply interwoven with everyday marginalisations that make it difficult to improve their wellbeing and that of their community. Any study and/or documentation of activists' journeys constructed on such ethics cautiously aims to expand the scope and space for future engagements (Divakalala, 2014). Similarly, in this thesis, I have laid the seeds for such community-building processes and am cautiously optimistic for a better future. Simultaneously, the hope for community-building complements the aim of contributing to new knowledge and knowledge-producing practices.

Another conceptual inspiration and grounding come from feminist interpretations of activist consciousness. They help me to identify and define activist consciousness on the margins. In other words, they are the working definitions of activist consciousness that drive my conceptual endeavours within the scope of this study.

The existing literature on feminist consciousness from the Global South suggests that activist consciousness is predominantly associated with the motive of sustaining feminist movements (Mohammed, 2018, p. 4). Drawing on a range of feminist scholars from the Global South and of those of colour from the West, Patricia Mohammed (2018) argues for feminist consciousness building across borders that not only recognises differences but also deals with them in ways that strengthen solidary building while acknowledging the power relations within and between locations of social hierarchies. The experiences of the activists in this research resonate with Mohammed's (2018) theorising. An introduction to feminist thinking has helped them understand historical differences, borders, movements/displacements of people, social organising, and solidarity building, with an awareness of power relations and social hierarchies.

I explore these nuances as emerging consciousnesses that are not only grounded in feminist thinking and activism such in the Global South but also shaped by the complexities of the subaltern context based on the socio-economic, political, and geographical locations of privilege and the legacies of differences.

Decolonial scholars Aníbal Quijano and Michael Ennis (2000) map out the colonial matrix of power in four interrelated categories: i) control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labour and natural resources), ii) control of authority (institution, army), iii) control of gender and sexuality (family, education), and iv) control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity) (see also Mignolo, 2007). Analysing the interrelated categories that produce a colonial matrix of power helped me to identify the four main threads with which to weave a mat of activist consciousness: i) awakening to identify injustices, ii) imaginaries of justice, iii) collaborations, and iv) positive critiquing practices. The activists' experiences show how these categories are at play in the post-war and postcolonial context of Lanka. A deeper engagement with these threads illuminates theoretical innovations related to i) intersectional marginalisations; ii) contours, collaborations, positive critiquing practices, and celebrations of activist consciousness; iii) feminist inspirations and aspirations from the Global South; and iv) collective calls to theory and practice emerging from the nuances of subalternity.

5

THREAD OF CONSCIOUSNESS 1:

AN AWAKENING TO IDENTIFY INJUSTICES

சமூகத்தின் அனைத்து கட்டமைப்புகளிலும் பெண்களுக்கு எதிரான ஒடுக்குமுறை சட்டம் சார்ந்தும், நடைமுறைசார்ந்தும் விரவிக் கிடக்கும் போது தமது நிலையை, எதிர்ப்பை, செயலாளுமையை இந்த ஆடைத் தெரிவின் ஊடாக இப்பெண்கள் தெரிவிக்கின்றனர். இதன் மூலம் அத்தனை ஒடுக்குமுறைக்குள்ளிருந்தும் ஒரு கவசமாக, கருவியாக புர்காவினை அணிவதன் ஊடாக கல்வித் தகைமை முதற் கொண்டு, சிறந்த தொழிலாளுமையைப் பெற்றுக் கொண்டது வரை இப்பெண்கள் சாதித்து வருகின்றமை ஏராளம் (Cegu Isadeen, 2019)

By choosing what they wish to wear, women express their realities, resistance, and agency at each intersection of structural oppression, including legal frameworks, against them. It is prevalent in society. Wearing the burqa is a shield and a tool to fight all various forms of oppression. Women continue to achieve a lot by making such choices to achieve the unachievable as women, like getting educated and finding desired jobs. (My translation)

The experiences of intersectional marginalisation inform the four main threads that can be woven together to create a mat of activist consciousness. I use the realisation of injustices experienced by activists as a conceptual tool to understand and explore the contours of consciousness and various forms of marginalisation. The concept of injustice is articulated against the backdrop of denied, restricted, or unequal access to resources and opportunities due to one's socio-cultural, economic, and geopolitical position, and of identities based on sex, gender, and sexuality (Baisantry, 1999; Divakalala, 2014; Gidla, 2017; Sumathy, 2016). In other words, based on their particular identities, locations, and histories, people are discriminated against and/or made to navigate through complicated systems and processes to gain access to education, housing, water and sanitation, social welfare support services, psychosocial support, infrastructural facilities, healthcare, and the rule of law or access to legal justice (Divakalala, 2005, 2008).

5.1 The Nexus of Sex, Gender, Sexuality, Class, and Religion

Jenita, a transwoman in her mid-twenties, lives with her family in a rented house within the city of Jaffna. She identifies as a Catholic, with critical views on religion-based discrimination. My interview with her occurred in December 2020. She joined the call from home. One of the first forms of marginalisation Jenita recalled was what she experienced during her school days. Due to intense bullying by peers and some teachers, Jenita could not continue her education after she began to feel and behave like a girl. Along with her transitioning gender identity, she was also marginalised because she came from a certain class, and her family did not have a privileged economic status. She was forced to quit school when the bullying became unbearable, and no one advocated for her right to continue her education at that time.

Jaffna society places high value on education and being educated. Sinnaiah Arasaratnam (1978, 1982) points out that since colonisation, education has been seen as offering the power of ideas and creating the future of Jaffna society. Education is ultimate assurance of a respectable position in Jaffna society. During the British colonial period, access to education in English reinforced class, caste, and religious privileges (Arasaratnam, 1978, 1982). This was manifested in the rigid division of educational institutions into those run by the Hindu temple, by charities, or by the Catholic Church. These educational hierarchies led to the marginalisation and ostracisation of those without education. Education meant better job opportunities, migration possibilities, and travel beyond the Northern region.

Today, education continues to play a major role in the lives of Jaffna Tamils. According to anthropologist Sharika Thiranagama (2011, p. 57), "Traditionally, one of the preeminent life stages in Jaffna Tamil life is 'schooling'. Young people's role in families was to study hard even if many could not always achieve these strictures." Therefore, being denied education from a Catholic school due to her sex and gender identities was a significant violation of Jenita's Jaffna Tamil life. Marginalising her by denying her access to school meant much more than losing free education at a state school. Jenita lost all hope of a better future. Socially, being denied school education also meant little chance of being respected and treated with dignity. Her job security and future career relied on her gaining the minimum qualifications and a school-leaving certificate (Arasaratnam, 1982). It was not Jenita's choice to leave school. She was forced to leave school for being different, for not being 'boy enough', and for being too friendly with girls. With a heaviness in her voice, she shared, "I knew that without [education] I would not be able to have a decent life. I knew that I needed some kind of a basic qualification to be employed and have a life on my own."

The marginalisation experienced by Jenita is twofold. First, she was denied the right to education due to her sex and gender identities; second, as a result of this denial, marginalised identities were created for her, such as someone who is not educated, someone who should not be respected, someone who is easily disposed of or forgotten, and someone who is not taken seriously. These intertwined forms of marginalisation can be interpreted along with the sex and gender identities on the surface. Only an in-depth look into the other intersections experienced by people like Jenita allows us to make sense of the subaltern experiences of marginalisation beyond the surface category that primarily focuses on identities.

Such layers of marginalisation get translated into realisations first on a personal level; subsequently, these realisations can move beyond the personal, especially in subaltern experiences from certain locations and histories. Jenita's and many other activists' experiences with injustice and how she has transformed them into activism validate this claim. They show that her activist consciousness developed due to multiple awakening processes that helped her identify that she was not treated the same as others. She realised that she had to fight for her rights and, eventually, for the rights of other marginalised people in her community. "This made an activist," confirmed Jenita.

Priya Thangarajah (2014), in her work with activists from Northern Lanka, notes that religious and cultural fundamentalisms affect the everyday lives of women and make it imperative for women to challenge such polarisations, especially in the North and the East of the country (Thangarajah, 2014). Jenita's activist consciousness and experiences of

marginalisation substantiate this observation. Jenita was 17 or 18 when she realised that she needed to speak up for herself. Following the experience of being denied school education, she realised that no one understood her. It is still difficult for society to understand trans people and their lives.

According to Jenita, her personal experiences of marginalisation led her to think more about her freedom and the freedom of other trans people, especially in a rigid society such as Jaffna. With a long history of experiencing violence, Jenita felt that being othered and subjected to forms of violence threatened her life and many others in her community. People in Jaffna tend to be close-minded and stick to their religious and cultural beliefs. According to the majority, trans people are not supposed to live. Many times, Jenita had considered ending her life. However, her immense willpower has enabled her to keep going: "The hardship of my life and the lives of other trans people made me an activist." Jenita was acutely aware of how difficult her life had become since she transitioned:

> Being a transwoman has been a challenge since the beginning. On all fronts – in my family, at school, and even when I walk down the street. Boys and men started to follow me and harassed me too. Even now, I still cannot walk peacefully. I am always rushing to wherever I intend to get to. I am always aware of my surroundings. I cannot afford to have a stroll. If I do, I will be violated in some way or the other – often sexually.

Jenita's growing consciousness of the need to identify the injustices she faced helped her develop strong survival instincts. This is another aspect of this thread that was shared by other activists in this study. Jenita had realised and come to terms with the fact that she was born in the wrong body:

> I was eight when I first felt comfortable in clothes that girls wore. Around that time, I played a girl character in a school play. I got to dress up in girls' clothes. After the play, I did not want to change into boys' clothes. I went back home dressed as a girl. That did not go well with my family. Since then, I have had strong feelings as a girl.

As I continue to weave this metaphorical mat, more forms of marginalisation are added to this nexus of sex, gender, sexuality, class, and religion. They all are interconnected, especially in terms of how they impact the lives of subaltern activists from particular locations. As these marginalisations evolve through the stories of the research participants, I show how they are profoundly entwined with one another and argue that a critical understanding of their subalternities – in other words, their subaltern histories, locations, contexts, and realities – is essential when theorising consciousness, activism, social change, and forms of marginalisation (Collin, 1990; Spivak, 1988).

5.2 CASTE

Another example of structural marginalisation in the education system comes from the narrative of Mala, a Dalit feminist activist in her mid-twenties from Jaffna. Mala's experience involves the addition of caste-based discrimination to the marginalisation nexus of ethnicity, class, and religion highlighted by Jenita (Rege, 1998, 2010). My interview with Mala occurred in December 2020. She was at home. Mala had graduated from the first university of Lanka – the University of Peradeniya – earlier in the year. The university is located approximately 350 kilometres from Mala's home. She spent more than four years in Peradeniya, which is located in the central part of Lanka, coming home during the university holidays.

After a brief exchange of greetings and small talk, which included the current COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions in her village, Mala introduced herself with the following sentence: "I was born in 1996 in a small village in northern Jaffna." Although she said it very cautiously, the firmness and the clarity in her voice indicated that everything that followed would not come easily, and that she had experienced profound struggles to get where she is now. She dived deep into the social and traditional hierarchies and marginalisations that she, her family, and her caste-based community have been subjected to, with a sense of pride in her voice.

> I am a Dalit. There is only one caste – which is our caste – that lives in my village. Hence, there were no caste-based discriminations in the village itself. However, it gets very obvious when we move to other villages or towns. You can see it at schools and tuition classes. When I was a child, I did not have an awareness of caste or ethnicity-based discriminations. The only difference that mattered a lot to me as I grew up was the different ways my young brother and I were treated at home. He is only one year younger than me. A phrase that my Appammaa [paternal grandmother] often used was 'pombalapillaiyallo' ['girl child, right'] which implies that a girl child is not allowed to do that. Pombalapillai [girl child] stays at home. Pombalapillai is not allowed to climb trees. I liked to climb trees. But I was not allowed to. It affected me a lot. I started to retaliate. Whenever I was told that pombalapillai must not do this, I did it tenaciously.

Mala quickly realised that she was treated differently as a girl. Often, she was scolded and asked to act like a girl when she did things that only boys were allowed to do – like climbing trees. She grew up with the consciousness that she would never be limited by a life that society had pre-assigned for her. The villagers complained about her to her family on a daily basis. Nevertheless, she continued to resist their rules. She realised early in life that she did not want to become the child who stayed at home and cooked for others: "I told myself vehemently that I would never be that child." Questioning why she was expected to behave differently from her brother helped her identify sex- and gender-based discriminatory treatment in both her family

and society at large. The fact that her brother got away with most things as he was a boy and never had any restrictions or rules to obey caused enormous pain for Mala. Her consciousness of the need to identify injustices evolved in this milieu.

When Mala started interacting with people outside of her village – first at school, then when she started to do community work, and later when she left Jaffna and Northern Lanka for her university education – her activist consciousness evolved as she was exposed to people from different backgrounds, histories, and struggles. Along the way, the nexus of caste, class, disability, sex, gender and sexuality-related marginalisations informed Mala's activist consciousness and helped her to identify – and fight against – injustices.

As a young school girl, her Dalit identity was not a subject of marginalisation for Mala. As the anthropologist Sharika Thiranagama (2018, p. 362) notes, "Caste, and the hierarchical civilities of the caste order, have been considerably more submerged within ethnic conflict, although central to everyday life in Sri Lanka." Caste-based marginalisations and divisions in Lanka have never been the same as those in South India, referred to as the ancestral homeland of Lanka Tamils by some scholars (e.g., Arasaratnam, 1978). Under the rule of the LTTE from the 1970s to 2009, the caste-based ghettoisation, access to land and other resources, education, and job categories ceased, and severe punishments were handed out to those who continued to discriminate by caste (Thiranagama, 2018).

As noted by several scholars, Northern Lankan Tamils upheld their religious and traditional beliefs that distributed power across caste, class, and religion throughout colonial rule. Their socio-economic systems changed, of course, but they ensured that patriarchal power structures within families and extended families and caste-based restrictions persisted (Arasaratnam, 1978, 1982). Education was an important tool that the Christian missionaries used to bring about changes in socio-economic practices. The Jaffna Tamils quickly adapted it to their favour, however, and used it to reinforce existing power asymmetries and hierarchies in all aspects of society (Arasaratnam, 1978, 1982).

Although caste-based divisions are today not as apparent as they were prior to the 1970s, they still exist. Caste-based ghettoisation is still prevalent in the village Mala grew up. Things have not changed much in many parts of Northern Lanka, especially in the rural areas. Everything from access to resources, service provisions, healthcare facilities, and infrastructural assistance is influenced by caste-based divisions. Who gets what from whom and when is still decided by those in power – in this case, those from the oppressing castes. At the same time, as I mentioned in Part I, the caste-based divisions and discriminations in Lanka have been shaped by the local histories, which cannot be understood through the same lenses

that have been applied to India (Thiranagama, 2011, 2018). Hence, we need new analytical tools that can help us understand the complexities of how caste operates and marginalises people in Lanka, especially in the North. Stories like Mala's offer us profound insights, which will be further revealed in the later chapters of Part III.

In the excerpt below, Mala reveals how her paternal caste has been systematically oppressed. Mala and her siblings are encouraged not to speak of their caste identity in public. Hence, Mala has never had these conversations until very recently, when she became aware of caste-based marginalisations through her community work. Mala's father was forced to choose a different profession – a profession that her mother thought would be more acceptable in society and one that brought less income. Mala's father preferred to continue his caste-based 'toddy tapping'[5] profession but has been denied the option of doing something that he is good at, passionate about, and feels very connected to. He did this in order for Mala and her siblings to be treated with greater respect by society, especially when they started schooling.

> My grandfather is from the toddy plugging caste. My father did the same job until my siblings and I started schooling. My mother wanted him to do carpentry, a job that does not disclose our caste. For us to be respected at school. My father changed his job. However, his heart was set on toddy plugging, mostly because it generated more family income. We never learned of the caste-based practices and discriminations during our childhood. Because predominantly everyone in our village belongs to the same caste. Even at school, I did not realise it until a teacher who belongs to our caste started to give me opportunities to do extracurricular activities that no other teacher had given me before. When I told my mother this, she said that she is trying to encourage girls from my caste who are otherwise not allowed to be popular.

As a girl from a specific caste, Mala was encouraged at school by a female teacher from the same caste who wanted to improve the futures of girls like Mala. This clearly shows that many people from oppressed castes do everything they can to improve the lives of others in the same situation. As Mala pointed out, it is an ongoing struggle that helps us understand the everyday marginalisation in post-war Northern Lanka across caste-based divisions. Mala's activist self is still grappling with owning her caste identity, even among friends and fellow activists whom she trusts.

Another form of marginalisation that Mala's narrative brings out, one which is entwined with all the other forms, is caused by the limited mobility of Dalit women. Mala shared that this severely restricts the kind of work available to her and women from her community. In Mala's words:

---

[5] Palm tree climbing and toddy tapping are traditional occupations. 'Toddy' refers to the sap of a palm that is naturally alcoholic.

> I live in a small village in Northern Jaffna. Not many people from there, especially women, go out too far to work. Many people from our village scold my mother for giving me that freedom. They say – you are letting the female child [*pombalapillai*] go out far to work. She will come back with some arbitrary person [i.e., find her own man]. Then only you will understand that you are wrong to send her out like that. Do not let her go. They say this repeatedly to my mother. Every time I leave the house for work or in search of a better job, people blame my mother, and she gets scolded by my paternal grandmother on a daily basis until I return.

In her study of Dalit women, vulnerabilities, and feminist consciousness, Abhinaya Ramesh (2020) argues that autonomous critical consciousness has been part of Dalit women's lives for centuries. She traces it to as early as the 14th century, when Dalit women poets like Soyarabai and Nirmala expressed critical consciousness in their readings and reflections on philosophies of life (Ramesh, 2020). According to Ramesh (2020, p. 10),

> The consciousness their verses articulate shows that unlike the upper caste and class women, they do not live as/under the shadow of their husbands. Beyond the language of difference, they have articulated a universal emancipatory consciousness. Moreover, instead of being engulfed in their own pain, they have tried to share and "own" the pain suffered by oppressed humanity.

The above illustration of Mala's experiences – the transformational aspects of the consciousness of a Dalit girl from family, school, and society at large to a grown woman graduate of a renowned university hundreds of kilometres away from her hometown – adds support to Ramesh's argument. The autonomous critical consciousness exhibited by Dalit women like Mala helps us understand the intricacies of how caste, class, sex, gender, and religious aspects of everyday lives influence who has access to what and where. This is reflected in, and elaborated on, in the narratives that follow.

5.3 VIOLENCE, LANGUAGE, AND LOCATION

In May 2021, I interviewed Margret, an activist in her mid-twenties from the coastal town of Mannar whose experiences add nuance to our understanding of caste-based divisions. While she is not from an oppressed caste, Margret has witnessed the caste-based atrocities inflicted on members of the various oppressed castes (Rege, 1998). Interestingly, Margret did not use the word 'Dalit' to talk about all oppressed castes, as a Dalit themselves might have – like in the case of Mala above. Margret's journey to becoming conscious of the need to identify injustices reveals further how forms of marginalisation due to sex, gender, caste, religion, class, location, and sexuality intertwine.

Margret vividly recalled her first experiences of sex- and gender-based marginalisation:

> It is the first realisation that hits you as a girl child that you are treated differently from your male siblings, male friends, and generally speaking men and boys. It starts at homes first. You are repeatedly told to behave like a girl and later a woman that society accepts. Anything that is outside these norms and practices can never be part of who you are or rather who you should be. You realise that you are being treated differently and that it is not right.

Margret acknowledged that her life was limited to her home and school until she was in her late teens. Her life was highly controlled by her parents, extended families, and neighbours, who always informed her parents if she had done anything that flouted gender norms or what was expected of her. Margret shared that her activist consciousness evolved as she began to identify people from different backgrounds being marginalised. For example, she did not know anything about caste-based discrimination until she went to Jaffna and saw people marginalised by others – by members of the privileged or oppressive castes.

Margret noticed that people did not socialise with others from a different caste. People from oppressed castes were not allowed to go inside the houses of the privileged castes. Caste-based divisions segregated villages (Rege, 1995, 2010). But no one ever spoke about it, Margret told me. She believes that "the kind of restrictions each community puts on its people based on divisional backgrounds tell a lot about how marginalisations are manifested and implemented by the privileged sections of society". Margret felt that our own struggles might not allow us to see other forms of marginalisation. Hence, one must learn to understand other people's struggles by having an open mind and listening empathetically.

Margret connected the birth of her activist consciousness with becoming aware of the everyday sufferings of survivors of sexual violence. Her years of experience as a community worker had taught her that women in general – but especially those from particular castes, classes, or religions, and those who speak Tamil only and/or are from certain geographical locations – and the LGBTQIA+ communities were the primary targets of sexual violence. She has also been subjected to discrimination in the workplace as a woman with certain identities and origins who is an ally of LGBTQIA+ communities. Midway through our conversation, Margret shared that she was questioning her gender and sexual identities. However, she could not yet escape the guilt and internalised sexism and homophobia that has been instilled in her by the Christian Church over her entire lifetime. She recognises that it will be a long struggle with her internal self.

Margret is also a survivor of intimate partner violence. She was trapped in an abusive relationship for several years and could not break the cycle of violence, despite her firm belief in women's rights. Margret's awakening to injustice also comes from a place of victimisation

and the processes of othering experienced when one tries to get out of situations of violence. There can be an enormous amount of shame that can stop survivors from escaping violent situations, no matter how strong and independent they are or feel.

5.4 Suffering, Sexual Violence, Media Representations, and Othering

As Part I of this thesis has shown, ever since the war ended in May 2009, cases of sexual violence against women appear to have increased in Lanka. While, I cannot easily substantiate this claim, it is clear to many scholars and activists that the visibility of sexual violence against women has increased (Jayawardena & Pinto-Jayawardena, 2016; Sivamohan, 2016). There could be many reasons for this. The biggest threat to survival, the war, was not there anymore, and the increased access to smartphones from 2009 has amplified communication avenues. Previously inaccessible geographical locations were suddenly visitable in the post-war context. A major factor was that there was now more media coverage of such crimes, mainly covering stories from the war-affected areas, and Northern Lanka has been a sensational highlight in the media world (Saroor, 2014). This region was not accessible for almost three decades, with a few exceptions for a short period during the ceasefire. Hence, exploring and covering news on the war-affected Northern region became a sensation after the war ended, contributing to the narrative of defeating the LTTE and celebrating the success of the 'one-nation' propaganda of the government at that time. Movements such as "Me Too" have increased the visibility of sexual harassment and violence globally, which has also impacted the local media in Lanka.

Reporting everyday war-related suffering is often challenging and limited due to everything from access to affected locations to a socio-political consciousness that is shaped by dominant nationalist discourses and privileges. Didier Fassin (2011) problematises the notion of humanitarianism and meaning-making practices adopted by the West in sharing the suffering of the 'other'. According to Fassin (2011, p. 25),

> Once we go beyond official statements to examine discourses and practices as implemented in national and local policies . . . we find that rather than a unilateral determination of direction and emphasis, what we are witnessing is a crystallisation of representations and ideas around a series of words and notions.

Fassin (2011) highlights the lack of representation of, and responses to, distant suffering, especially amid and after a brutal ethnic war. In addition, the language of suffering needs to be unpacked in the context of highly tenuous ethnolinguistic divisions in Lanka (see Part I of this thesis).

The various theorisations of suffering suggest that psychological and social constructions contribute to the political economy of suffering (see, e.g., Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996; Levinas, 1998). The representation of each type of construction depends on the experience of suffering as lived, shared, and listened. The language used in the articulation of the experience plays a vital role, as do cultural constructions of suffering (Fassin, 2011). Unfortunately, the news coverage in Lanka seldom captures the complex realities of the everyday suffering of marginalised sections of society, as outlined in Part I of this thesis. Hence, it is important to remind the reader that my analysis is based on in-depth interviews conducted in a country that had only a decade earlier been at war with itself.

The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's (1998) concept of useless suffering helps us understand how activist consciousness can evolve from painful experiences, in both childhood and adulthood. The suffering of marginalised groups becomes 'useless' to those who marginalise them. However, both the victimiser and the victim are produced and reproduced in relation to one another. I argue that activists continue to make sense of their own suffering in nuanced ways to manifest purposes and address the legacies of differences. I explore this in more detail in Chapter 6.

According to Levinas (1998, pp. 164–165),

> To envisage suffering, as I have just attempted to do, in the inter-human perspective – that is, as meaningful in me – useless in the Other – does not consist in adopting a relative point of view on it, but in restoring it to the dimensions of meaning outside of which the immanent and savage concreteness of evil in a consciousness is but as abstraction. To think suffering is an inter-human perspective does not amount to seeing it in the coexistence of a multiplicity of consciousnesses, or in a social determinism, accompanied by the simple knowledge that people in society can have of their neighbourliness or of their common destiny.

The useless suffering of the self and others can be applied as a critical lens to locate the social, cultural, historical, and political discourses that inform activist consciousness. Similarly, Kleinman and Kleinman (1996) argue for collective modes of experience, social interactions, cultural and political processes, and professional appropriations in the process of understanding and/or making sense of suffering – especially when one tries to represent others' suffering. According to the authors,

> Cultural representations, authorised by a moral community and its institutions, elaborate different modes of suffering. Yet, local differences – in gender, age group, class, ethnicity, and of course subjectivity – as well as the penetration of global processes into local worlds – make this social influence partial and complex. (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996, p. 2)

Reflecting on these scholarly contributions, I highlight that suffering narratives cannot be articulated without considering the motivational factors and the social, cultural, political, and economic factors affecting the unique context of the sufferer and the cause of the suffering. The project of meaning-making is complex and should aim to move beyond limiting trajectories. Hence, my thesis uses intertwined aspects of everyday suffering to understand activist consciousness in its multiple forms and identify the main threads of that consciousness through activists' critical reflections on activism, social change, and forms of marginalisation.

5.5 Ethnicity and Language

Many scholars have argued that lives in Lanka are profoundly ethnicised (see, e.g., Thiranagama, 2011). My own research, including this thesis, is no exception (Divakalala, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2014, 2020). The lives of Lankans cannot be fully understood without an ethnicity-based lens. However, ethnicity-based marginalisation is always intertwined with other forms of marginalisation. The first thread of consciousness – an awakening to identify injustices – is strengthened by experiences of marginalisation based on ethnic differences. Due to the prolonged ethnic conflict in Lanka, it has been a common element of this thread where all research participants shared their experiences of being discriminated against due to their ethnicity. Their ethnic identities and the marginalisations that they faced due to their ethnic differences and how those differences caused troubles and violence against them developed their activist consciousness.

All of my research participants identified as either Muslim or Tamil, and all had Tamil is their first language. As explained in the introductory chapters of this thesis, the Muslim is an ethnic identity in the context of ethnic conflict in Lanka. The shared consciousness of awakening to ethnicity-based injustices comes from a place of desiring the marginalised ethnicities to be recognised more in all aspects of life. However, as with all other experiences shared in this thesis, none of them focuses on a single form of marginalisation at any given point in time or space/location. This thread of activist consciousness articulates interconnected aspects of various forms of marginalisation, as we have seen throughout this chapter.

My interview with Banu, a Muslim transwoman in her early twenties, occurred in April 2021. She joined the call from home. We spoke for about a couple of hours, slightly longer than the other activist interviews. I wanted to make sure that Banu was in a pleasant state of mind at the end of our conversation, something I had strived to achieve with all my research participants. This took longer with some than others as I tried to find something they really

liked to talk about to ensure that they had moved on from the often painful memories that had been discussed. I shared my own understanding of struggle by offering snippets of my previous work in and on Lanka to connect and show solidarity. With Banu, trust had to be built this way as she and I come from different ethnicities and religions that had recently been at war with each other for decades (see the introductory chapters of this thesis for more detail). I was cautious when speaking of the dynamics of the insider/outsider standpoint (discussed in the Methodology chapter). Understanding and connecting at a level where acknowledging the pain and suffering caused by a certain population of my ethnicity to Banu's ethnicity was crucial. Similarly, I had related to other participants by openly acknowledging my privileged positions across class, caste, ethnicity, language, and locations.

"I am a Muslim transwoman" was the first thing Banu said in our interview. She had been transitioning over the past few years. Like the transition journey of many trans people, Banu's has been profoundly painful. Apart from the physical and psychological struggles of the transitioning process, her family and society at large have caused her enormous pain. She has been subjected to physical and psychosocial violence. Although she does not live in a violent household anymore, the memories of her experiences still traumatise Banu. She had to flee from the violent home and seek refuge in Colombo, the capital, with only limited knowledge of English and Sinhala. She had barely reached adulthood at this time. She had no way of taking care of herself until she came across a trans group in Colombo by chance which helped her survive and support herself. Banu's activist consciousness has been evolving ever since then:

> When I decided to transition a few years ago, there were a lot of obstacles and struggles. First of all, my family did not agree with it. I moved cities to be able to go through the transition. When I am now, there are expectations to be certain ways as a young Muslim woman. There are so many limitations like everything from what I wear, where I go, who I meet, what I eat to what time I return home was controlled. I did not experience all these limitations when I was a boy. Now, I understand how badly our society treats girls and women.

Banu's experiences of marginalisation reveal intersectional layers of othering based on sex, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, and class differences. The quote at the start of this chapter illustrates how Muslim women use the burqa as a tool to achieve their wishes and desires in life. Transwomen are no exception in this context. However, as I highlighted in Part I of this thesis, academic reflections on experiences like Banu's are yet to emerge in Lanka (Wijewardene, 2007). For a very long time, dominant gender roles and the gender binary have

defined interpretations of experiences of marginalisation. This thesis was conceived to address this gap in the literature.

According to Banu, Muslim transwomen, especially those from the lower middle class and who only speak Tamil, face additional challenges. The layers of discrimination that Muslim women experience due to rigid controls over their bodies are also experienced by Muslim transwomen. While she still lived at home, Banu's family took her to hospital and wanted to treat her for mental health issues. According to their beliefs, identifying as a trans person is deviant and abnormal, and something that needs to be treated medically.

> They beat me pretty badly. Every day was a nightmare. They took me to do special prayers to chase away the demon in me. They shaved off my hair. This lasted for about a couple of months. I thought that they would eventually understand me and my feelings. I thought that it would be good to have the support of my parents as a Muslim woman in our society. But I was very wrong. I tried to make them understand me for who I am. Sadly, they did not understand me. They added further stress to my life. I tolerated it as much as I could and left home when I could not bear it anymore.

The violent atrocities to which Banu was subjected gave birth to her activist consciousness as an awakening to identify injustices. In the next chapter, I provide further analysis on how such violent intolerance towards transgender and intersex persons can be turned into imaginaries of justice within the activist consciousness.

The experiences of another trans person bring additional nuances to the nexus of intersectional marginalisation. I interviewed Daya, a trans activist in her mid-twenties from Jaffna who had been displaced several times due to the war, in February 2021. She was at home. She shared the following at the start of our conversation: "I became an activist first for my rights as a Tamil. I was living in Vanni [a northern region that has seen grave historical violence against Tamils and Muslims] at that time. I was 17 or 18. It was something I had to do." Daya's activist consciousness as an awakening to identify injustices started with her experiences of marginalisation due to her ethnicity and specific location in Northern Lanka. The war had not ended by then. Then a young man, Daya realised that the Tamil language was not considered equal in status to the Sinhala language. A few years later, Daya started to identify as a woman. The following describes some of the challenges that she faces as a transwoman who does not want to undergo medical transition:

> I am a transwoman who still chooses to be in the body of a man that I was born with. I became an advocate for people marginalised by identities based on gender and sexual orientations. I am in my mid-twenties now. I do not believe in the binary. However, I cannot dress in whatever way I want due to socio-cultural taboos. I am still negotiating my identities on a daily basis. Right now, I live with another trans person in a rented house. Inside the house, I wear dresses and skirts. But I cannot be seen in those clothes

> by my neighbours, let alone going outside the house in them. Social policing is huge in Jaffna.

Daya, the only transwoman in Jaffna who has a lot of body hair, including a beard and a moustache, dresses in non-binary clothing and uses the pronouns she/her. She is out and open about who she is. Daya lives in a rented house with another trans person. She would not be able to live the life that she desires if she lived with her family. Daya had to move out when her family and neighbours found out about her new gender identity and disapproved of it. According to her, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of trans people in the Jaffna district. However, there are no official statistics available, which she says is one of the biggest problems in ensuring that trans people get the kind of support that they need. Daya is also critical of the gender binary and still questions her choice of identifying as she/her:

> When I transitioned, I found a name that suits me. I like it and use it publicly. I use she/her pronouns. However, I find it problematic lately. I am aware that I limit myself in the binary of sexes. I am confused. I know that I am a woman inside. So, I am a woman. Therefore, I use she/her pronouns. However, these are also based on the binary of women and men. I feel like I am being pushed into this binary. Recently, I find myself resisting this binary. I do not want to be limited by this binary. I am still searching for more ways of identifying myself that does not limit me.

How one experiences different forms of marginalisation significantly influences the development of one's activist consciousness. Daya's experiences reveal that her activist consciousness emerged as a complex intersection of injustices based on ethnicity, language, sex, gender, and geopolitics. She also now finds herself problematising the binary categorisation of sex and gender.

The experiences of becoming aware of injustices across multiple forms of marginalisation are reflected in all narratives of my research participants. I interviewed Latha, an activist in her late twenties from Kilinochchi, via video call in May 2021. Kilinochchi is heavily influenced by the adjoining cities of Jaffna, Mullaithivu, and Mannar. The social, cultural, economic, and political adversities of these cities are an additional burden on the residents of Kilinochchi as a result. There are significant power struggles within government and non-government bodies. The predominantly agricultural economy of Kilinochchi has welcomed many Tamil-speaking populations from across the country. Administratively speaking, it is the youngest district in the region; hence, the challenges it faces. Latha navigates additional hurdles in struggling to be heard for the same reasons. Her activist consciousness as awakening to identify injustices was born and raised in this milieu:

> I live with my father. I have an older sister and a younger sister. Both are married and live with their husbands' families. My mother died in the last stages of the war. She

> was married before and had sons. Her sons and husband died in the war too. They fought as well. She remarried my father. After her death, my father is not the same person. He started to drink a lot. He started to smoke a lot too. I was only 17 then. My sisters and I did not know to manage our father. We had to stop schooling as we did not have enough money for food or clothing. My father could not get a regular job. Even when he made some money, he spent most of it on alcohol and cigarettes. He even started to pay women for sex. He was never like that. He almost abandoned us. After a while, he started to have a relationship with one of the women.

Latha's awakening to identify injustices continued as she made sense of the everyday struggles of women in her society. She lost her mother at a young age. Her father took care of his children and brought them up. After being repeatedly displaced, the family lived in refugee camps during the last stages of the war in 2008 and 2009. Latha's father did everything to keep them alive and feed them. At the camps, he cooked, cleaned, and stood in various queues to get dry food rations and other supplies provided by the humanitarian organisations helping the internally displaced people. Latha thought that he was doing well at playing the mother role. Unfortunately, things started to change after the war. He became particularly neglectful and it damaged her family significantly:

> He was not the same when we returned to our village after the war had ended. Life without our mother was tough. There is a proverb – wounds get healed, not the scars. This is very true in my life with regard to many things. I have to keep fighting for my life, freedom, and survival along with those like me in society.

Latha's experiences – the scars she carries and how she makes sense of them – reveal the high level of understanding that activists like her have in relation to the kinds of marginalisation women experience in our society. They are the knowers and knowledge producers (Alcoff & Dalmiya, 1993). A profound awareness of the social, cultural, economic, and political dynamics that activists like Latha navigate on a daily basis provides the necessary contextual understanding of their realities.

5.6 Body, Bodily Integrity, and Multiple Displacements

The war has significantly shaped the lives of the Lankan population, especially those from the North and the East. As I pointed out in the introductory chapters of this thesis, there is a plethora of scholarship on what kind of toll the war has taken on people, the economy, and the environment. As Bryan Pfaffenberger (1994, p. 2) points out, Lanka has been referred as "the Beirut of South Asia":

> The war has devastated the Tamil-dominated north and east and compelled half a million Sri Lankans, most of them Tamils, to leave the country. Seemingly incapable

> of resolution, the conflict has earned Sri Lanka the unenviable epithet "the Beirut of South Asia."

Multiple, mass displacements were common during the war. People constantly moved in search of refuge from the ongoing atrocities. Economically speaking, internal migration has historically involved Lankan communities searching for better job opportunities and seasonal jobs like fishing and agriculture. Although many scholarly works have reflected and documented these experiences, the experiences of marginalised migrants have not featured as part of mainstream information sharing and knowledge production.

An important contribution to understanding activist consciousness beyond the usual narratives is the experiences of Shanthi, an intersex person in late-twenties from Northern Province whom I interviewed in August 2021. She joined the call from her agricultural land. Shanthi's activist consciousness developed by making sense of her body, which at first seemed unrelatable. She was displaced multiple times in the first two decades of her life. In all her journeys of displacement from one place to another within Northern Lanka, Shanthi has constantly been looking for alliances and a sense of community. According to her, this is mainly due to her intersex condition:

> Due to the war and constant displacements, my sister and I could not continue our education beyond grade 11. Our grandmother died in 2007. She was the one who understood me. My parents did not have a clue about me or my body. My grandmother understood that I was different. She never forced me to do anything. My sister and I miss her a lot. Our father left us in the midst of wartime. Our mother did not work much outside the house. We did not have enough money to have three meals a day. My mother's brothers were helpful then. We would always displace with them so that they could feed us.

The only person in her extended family that understood Shanthi was her grandmother. The pain of losing someone who was her only ally in the family came through in the emotion of Shanthi's voice when she spoke of her grandmother. After her father abandoned their family, her mother, who suffered from health conditions, could not afford to raise two children. Shanthi's extended family on her mother's side helped them to have enough food on their plates. However, Shanthi did not get the nutritious diet her body needed.

> My body was different. I do not have properly developed genitals. Until very recently, I did not even know that there were people like me, and they call us intersex. We were called by other words that were not very pleasant. My grandmother was protective of me and allowed me to dress however I wanted. I felt like a girl. But later, I started to develop the bodily characters of a man. Now, I feel like a man. I am attracted to women. But I still wear dresses.

Shanthi grew up not knowing what her sex and gender were. She still uses she/her pronouns as she is not aware of other options available to her. She lives in a rural village in Northern Lanka

where everyone is a man or a woman. Shanthi has never met another intersex person in her life. She is still searching.

Shanthi had spent more of her life not knowing why she was different than my other research participants. She was always tired. Her legs were fragile. She couldn't stand for a long time:

> I get tired very quickly. Running to find shelter from constant bombing and shelling and displacing from one place to another by foot made me completely unable to walk for months. I needed nutritious food. However, my family could not afford that.

Shanthi returned to her village in 2011 with her sister and mother. They lived in the refugee camp for the next two years. Due to their state of poverty, her younger sister went to live with their aunty in Jaffna to have a better life. Shanthi and her mother received a house as part of a housing scheme that helped people who had just returned to their places of origin after losing their properties and belongings due to the war. Now, Shanthi's mother is over 50 and increasingly becoming sick. Shanthi is the sole income generator of the two. She did not find it easy to rebuild her life in the post-war context:

> This is when I slowly started to learn my way through our society. I gave tuition classes to little children. But that income was not enough. There is a small plot of land. I started to do peanut cultivation. It is a hard job. I could not afford to employ people. I did everything myself. It is not a steady income. If it rains at the wrong time, everything is a loss. I tried to do it as much as I could. I am also learning to sew.

Shanthi's activist consciousness is grounded not only on awareness-raising but also on her search for someone who experiences the same condition as her. The dominant way of making sense of experiences based on the binary of genders is challenged by such narratives. Shanthi is still grappling with questions of the body and body politics.

The challenge of understanding one's body without reference to similar bodies is immense. Having to navigate a physical body that one does not quite understand while coming of age in the midst of a brutal war is even more traumatic. The post-war context brings further challenges – such as finding a home, rebuilding lives, and being the sole income generator of the family. Shanthi's experiences significantly shaped her activist consciousness around identifying injustices by looking for a sense of community and relatedness.

All of the activists who participated in this research have been affected by different forms of violence and marginalisation which are often intertwined with class, poverty, sex, gender, and ethnicity. I emphasise the agency of the participants and avoid the word 'victim' as I believe it limits the scope of the activists' agency strongly suggested in my data. Moreover, they identify as activists, not as victims. All displayed a profound sense of commitment even

when their personal lives or the lives of their loved ones were at risk. Their critical engagements with the awakened activist consciousness guide them in various directions, but mainly towards collaborations with other activists and/or developing a sense of community. Their first motivation is usually to look out for others with similar experiences to their own.

Scholars of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group inspired by Gramscian ideas argue that the population on the margins that are often left out by hegemonic powers and knowledge productions represent the "life of the masses with greater consistency, cohesion, and political consciousness" (Chakrabarty, 2015; see also Guha & Spivak, 1988; Kapoor, 2004; Spivak, 1988).

The thread of consciousness explored in this chapter shows that identifying intersectional injustices plays a vital role in subaltern consciousness. Spivak (1988) points out that researchers, knowledge producers, and practitioners ought to be constantly self-reflexive and self-critical when representing the West's Other – the Third World – and the Third World's Other – the subaltern (Spivak, 1988). The activists' experiences of intersectional marginalisation documented in this chapter reveal how the Other is created in subaltern contexts and how activist consciousness evolves towards identifying intersectional injustices. These are the particular experiences of an overarching subalternity that significantly influences how activist spaces are shaped and actions towards social change are manifested and practised.

To conclude, this chapter has explored the contours of the first thread of consciousness – an awakening to injustice – using activists' own experiences. It has argued that multiple awakening processes create this thread of consciousness. The analysis has provided an overarching understanding of intersectional marginalisation through subaltern experiences. The findings show that the intersections of marginalisation related to sex, gender, sexuality, class, caste, religion, language, bodily integrity, and geopolitics undoubtedly exacerbate injustices. The awakening to intersectional injustice substantially shapes how activists work for social change in post-war social justice movements in Lanka, even as divisions and difficulties persist, which is explored in the next chapter.

6

THREAD OF CONSCIOUSNESS 2: IMAGINARIES OF JUSTICE BEYOND THE BINARY

Theertha's contribution to the evolution of contemporary women's art has been to provide the much-needed intellectual basis and the subaltern/localised approach informed by feminism to women's art that goes beyond the theoretical definitions presented by Euro-American feminism and its art trends. (A. Perera, n.d.)

In this chapter, I argue that Lanka's precarious past has produced its precarious present. At the same time, however, it has created the space for innovative futures where activists create imaginaries of justice beyond binary thinking and develop ways of addressing social issues that ensure a sense of justice. This happens via two distinct processes. First, activists' consciousness evolves through reactive processes in which their actions aim to challenge forms of marginalisation in the immediate environment. Second, carefully woven actions transform into proactive imaginations of justice. The findings of this chapter reveal that activists are constantly negotiating intersectional subaltern experiences of marginalisation. I show that a profoundly complex understanding of power structures shapes their consciousness of reactive and proactive imaginaries of justice beyond the binaries produced by historically marginalised identities and locations.

I use trans, intersex, and Dalit subaltern experiences to challenge the domination of binary thinking in locating and analysing our worlds. I show that research into intersectional subaltern experiences can expand traditional analytical categories, deepening our understanding of marginalisation and its complex nuances at every intersection. Such expansions help to generate new theories and profound interpretations of our social worlds, and support the development of more effective policies and practices to bring about positive change in people's lives.

The quotation that begins this chapter is from an artist-led initiative in Lanka that supports subaltern imaginations through a multi-ethnic lens. Similarly, by grounding the experiences of these activists in my study in local imaginaries of justice, I weave together their experiences to show the importance of subaltern locations and standpoints in shaping theoretical innovations and practices. The findings are woven using the tenets of reactive processes such as politics of consciousness, the open-mindedness to manifest collaboratively, the inner voice, challenging societal expectations based on discriminatory thinking, and manifesting ambitions to move beyond. The tenets of proactive processes include manifesting unifying purposes beyond their differences and challenging forms of marginalisation.

The recent people's uprising across Lanka (see, e.g., Das, 2022; 'India Helps Sri Lanka', 2022; 'Traffic at Indian Ports', 2022) supports my claim that activists from the peripheries – geographically, economically, culturally, politically, socially, and historically – are starting to revolutionise activism from their intersectional subaltern locations (explored further in Chapter 7). Profound self-critiques and the pressing critically reflective and innovative questions they are asking of each other and/or other movements shape this powerful rhetoric. The questions are usually around representations and approaches, and there is a desire

to not over generalise their voices and struggles for freedom. This trend was started by the activists in the North and East of the country in the post-ethnic war context.

I became an activist amid the ethnic war in Northern Lanka during my teen years in the 1990s. Now, located safely in Aotearoa New Zealand, I feel privileged to view, reflect, and write about activism for social justice and positive change during this historic moment. I should add that the recent uprising was peaceful until it was disrupted by violence instigated by corrupt and authoritarian politicians (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Violent ways of showing disappointment and distrust in governments have characterised popular uprisings in Lanka since colonisation (Devotta, 2004; Pfaffenberger, 1994; Razak & Saleem, 2022). Witnessing and processing these events from afar broke my heart, especially the activist in me.

My research shows that the consciousness of Lankan activists is challenging this binary of concepts, identities, and geopolitical locations for the better for all. The boundaries are often blurred significantly in the context of the tenuous circumstances of everyday life, especially in the face of a financial crisis (Chandrasekera, 2022) more serious than ever before. The perspectives activists bring with them into the public sphere are significantly shaping the future of this teardrop island in the Indian Ocean. I get to reflect, analyse, and write about this pivotal moment and offer profound insights with the help of the subaltern activist participants in this research.

6.1 Manifesting Purposes

This section addresses the following question: What are the differences the activists in this study negotiate to find common ground amongst themselves? This thread of consciousness weaves through the ingrained differences negotiated by activists to manifest purposes of various kinds. I show that particular locations and standpoints of subalternity identify and shape reactive processes through actions that address and challenge these differences.

My conversations with activists revealed that over the past few years, activists have founded several informal collectives to address issues of marginalisation due to sex and gender identities. Although ciswomen predominantly occupy such collective spaces, trans and intersex experiences are being elevated from the margins. This is being done by trans and intersex activists themselves, and some cisgender activists in these spaces are calling for trans voices to join the forefront of activism. Despite the different social locations and backgrounds the activists come from, they manage to connect on their visions of justice (Dave, 2012).

The shared interest to connect beyond their differences brings them together with the hope of building a better future. This is the milieu in which activists come together to imagine and create spaces and platforms. This is where they manifest purposes. The process is profoundly based on their experiences of struggle and celebration of actions taken to change an adverse situation. I focus in this research on the voices of trans, intersex, and Dalit persons to explore the unique contributions that they bring to this exercise of meaning-making and producing knowledge beyond binary thinking. I also reveal how voices of ciswomen activists echo and/or complement the activism of trans and intersex persons.

The work of Jennifer Bickham Mendez (2008) points out that scholar activism could make significant contributions to social justice if academia is open to the idea of challenging and unlocking the counter-hegemonic potentials of academic pursuits such as my research (Mendez, 2008). To bridge the gap between innovative theorising and the activists' narratives, I show that the activists' consciousness shapes imaginaries of justice to manifest purposes into carefully woven reactive actions based on intersectional subaltern locations.

6.1.1 Manifesting Purposes beyond the Complex Intersections of Sex, Gender, Ethnic, and Language Differences

As a transwoman who is part of a few informal collectives (they are not named for ethical reasons), Jenita shared that along with differences of opinion, activists bring complexities to the collective in terms of privileged positions such as ethnicity, class, caste, language, sex, gender, sexuality, locations (where they live and which part of the country they were born), knowledge and expertise, professional attachments, years of experience, and access to resources like housing, clean drinking water, education, healthcare, and other infrastructural facilities. Jenita repeatedly emphasised that such complexities are often interconnected, leading her to question:

> Who gets to be part of a collective, who are the decision-makers, how democratic the functions and practices within the collective, who do the organising, does everyone who shares the space at a given point of time get to contribute despite the language differences, and how to handle the disagreements within the group?

However, the collectives do come together to work towards a few common social change goals, such as access to better healthcare for trans persons, and celebrate achievements – big and small – along the way. Due to the risk of being ostracised or excluded, however, the complex interplay of power dynamics and lack of representation of the marginalised within the marginalised are seldom addressed. Jenita shared that she is slowly nudging the collectives

towards addressing these issues, which I explore further below. Along with her fellow activist colleagues, she hopes there will be collective growth in this area. For Jenita, this is how collaborative consciousness is built (explored further in Chapter 7).

Banu's experiences show that activists' imaginaries of justice acknowledge the differences in social locations, identities, and ideologies in various reactive processes. This is done through a combination of expanding their understandings of justice – not being limited by the legal interpretations of justice – and the willingness to manifest purposes with other activists who work with different communities to promote social, political, legal, and economic justice based on their localities and a shared sense of openness to negotiating the differences among them productively. In this way they can see beyond the pain and suffering these differences have brought to their lives. According to Banu,

> We [activists] realise that there are so many things that connects us than those that divide us. If we are only worried about what divides us, then we fail to understand with the same issue but affected differently. Their experiences can be different from ours. However, the issue will be the same. Such as ethnicity-based discrimination. As a Muslim transwoman, my experiences are different from those of a Tamil from certain sex and gender identity. It also differs from where we are originally from in Sri Lanka. North and East have different experiences when it comes to the war related adversities. Moreover, there are different kinds of solutions to a problem. Everything is not always social or legal or medical. It can be one or more or everything connected at various degrees. Working together help us identify these and explore effective ways of spending our time, money, and other resources. I see a lot of differences in me since the time I started to do community work collectively. My understandings of social issues have grown. I have grown. I am more mature in ways I think and behave. I feel happy when someone asks for my opinion. To me, this shows that I have grown in my thinking and others respect my views.

Banu accentuates the importance of manifesting purposes through reactive processes such as the awareness of the power of unity and connectedness and the willingness to have an open mind to accommodate differences and experiences of pain and suffering within and between divisions. I call these processes reactive because they are based on everyday examples of marginalisations and/or discriminatory values and practices. As shown in the activists' narratives, their manifestations happen as a reaction to these experiences. This is one aspect of 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness.

Lankans have been struggling for equal political representation since gaining independence from the British. As demonstrated in Part I of this thesis, many scholars have pointed to the unequal political power struggles between Lankan ethnicities and the toll they have taken on the population. The lost indigeneity of Lankans needs to be re-searched and re-established to counter the ethnic politics that has been dividing the country since independence.

Activists have been working hard to manifest this particular purpose, especially in the post-war context. They have been challenging the centralised political system developed in the wake of independence by emphasising experiences of marginalisation and stories of resistance from the geographical peripheries.

Anthropologists have argued that despite the repeated attempts by politicians to divide the population along with ethnic divisions and fuel hatred, historically there were many similarities between ethnicities and the variations within them (Manogaran & Pfaffenberger, 1994). The activists whose experiences bring life to my thesis echo this through their reactive responses to marginalisations.

When speaking of ethnic differences, Jenita described how such differences are perceived and negotiated to manifest purposes:

> I was boarded at a Muslim woman's house in Colombo. She was living with her daughter. A friend recommended her place. The woman was very nice to me. I even ate with them. I paid for the meals. She was very kind and supportive. However, there were a lot of police raids around that time. I think it was due to drug related problems and rumours. Police checked everyone's room. I did not speak any Sinhala. The woman was helpful. But the police often asked why someone like me from Jaffna is staying there. They were very suspicious. It was because I am a trans Tamil. I moved back to Jaffna after a few months. I could not survive in Colombo as a non-Sinhala speaking Tamil who is also trans. Other than a few friends, I did not feel welcomed or comfortable in Colombo. Ethnic differences get worse when other factors like my gender give more reason for them to corner me.

Jenita's consciousness weaves the mat with the thread of building relationships across multi-ethnic barriers. She believes support structures must address ethnic differences and offer solutions without discriminating against anyone due to their ethnicity and/or the language they speak or do not speak. Jenita's consciousness is shaped by her experiential knowledge of being a transwoman in a society that significantly determines and controls how lives are lived with sex and gender boundaries, reinforcing the discriminatory divisions. Hence, the awareness of the need to manifest beyond such discriminatory divisions or differences is a profound example of the 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness.

In Chapter 5, I showed how Daya's activist consciousness emerged in the complex intersections of injustices based on ethnicity, language, sex, gender, and geopolitics. Daya identified as a human rights defender based on her experiences with such forms of marginalisation. However, recalling her activist journey since then, she added:

> There is never only one issue against which we are marginalised and I am not the only one affected. When I associate with the term 'human rights defender', I was only thinking about my personal experiences of marginalisation. It took me a while to understand that there are more people marginalised for various reasons in different

> communities. Beyond ethnic and trans rights, I have started to look deeper into challenges and obstacles to achieve land rights, women's rights, environmental issues, and caste issues. Slowly, I transitioned from being the defender of my own rights to the defender and an activist for the rights of other marginalised peoples and communities.

For Daya, this thread of consciousness has evolved to manifest purposes beyond sex, gender, and ethnic differences. Above she brings in more intersections – such as the struggles to claim land entitlements and environmental justice. Part I of this thesis explored the intricacies of how each form of marginalisation is deeply connected to another in Lanka. Daya's experiences, and those of many others, echo this complex reality. The imagination of activism that manifests purposes beyond the limitations of single and singular experience and/or narrative is what shapes the 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness. As Daya succinctly told me, "The understanding of various forms of marginalisations beyond my own experiences or the experiences of my immediate family and community made me the human rights activist that I am today."

A key tenet of Daya's activism is the need to move beyond the binary notions of sex and gender:

> When we were talking about Sinhala Buddhist domination and the atrocities faced by Tamils in the hands of an authoritarian and violent state, we did not acknowledge or speak of any other form of marginalisation other than ethnicity- and language-based ones. We did not take a deeper look into our struggles. I hardly saw any representation of anything other than men and women when it came to sex and gender. It was not part of our language to speak of transgender or intersex persons. They were there. I was there. But everything was seen within the binary. I did not know a single Tamil-speaking trans activist then. It was on the internet that I was first exposed to terms like trans, non-binary, intersex, etc. Identifying this as a problem is where I see when we consciously become aware of our limitations. This becomes the politics of our activism.

Daya explains that until recently many activists, including trans activists, had little knowledge of trans rights activism. Therefore, activists like Daya are pioneers in this area, especially in Northern Lanka. However, the lack of representation of trans voices and struggles also meant no awareness of trans lives. There was no one activist like Daya could look up to from previous generations. The lack of political representation meant that it was simply not an option to be trans in this society:

> I used to think that feeling like a trans person is being gay. The fact that I could even be in a wrong body was not an option to me. Initially, I thought I was gay. I was attracted to men. I was in a male body. That was the definition I got online based on my sexual attraction. I had not heard of the word intersex by then either. It took me a few years to understand the differences between sex, gender, and sexual identities and how they are dominated by the binary of sexes and gender and heterosexuality in our society. When I started to talk to trans activists from South India online and be exposed to their work,

> I started to question my own body, bodily feelings and emotions and identities of the gender that I strongly connect with, which is female.

The internal dialogues with which one tries to understand one's sex, gender, and sexuality is an essential aspect of manifesting purposes, which ultimately helps shape the 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness. Such dialogues and support from the extended community are critical to challenging and overcoming dominant norms and practices around sex, gender, and sexuality that are often confusing and discriminatory. The activists' reported that their internal dialogues commenced around the time their consciousness awakened to identify injustices (Chapter 5) and that it had continued to evolve and take various shapes and forms.

6.1.2 Manifesting Purposes beyond Internalised Transphobia and Homophobia

According to Mala, the sex and gender norms that existed for generations are tough to understand and make discrimination an everyday reality for those outside those norms. She acknowledges that no matter how hard she tries to question the deeply embedded discriminatory attitudes, especially towards trans and intersex persons and anything other than heterosexuality, she has nevertheless been affected by norms she has picked up from working with people who do not identify the same way that she does when it comes to sex, gender, and sexuality. Mala explained that "the patriarchal values and discriminatory practices are deeply hidden inside me. I feel like they are working against me and what I believe even without my consciousness." To Mala, the complete absence of trans and intersex persons from the public spheres of society is a form of discrimination. She thinks that this is how their identities are suppressed and forced to assimilate with the dominant binary identities of sex and gender. This realisation is what I call the reactive consciousness that helps activists like Mala to manifest purposes beyond internalised transphobia and homophobia.

Margret's experiences complement Mala's and problematise internalised transphobia and homophobia further. Most of what Margret shared in this regard mirrors the same kind of ignorance and discrimination of certain kinds of sex, gender, and sexual identities at a societal level that Mala spoke of. In addition, Margret's experiences also bring examples of how such ignorance and discrimination have been institutionalised. Speaking of her inner struggles, Margret identified her limitations around being able to work with different kinds of sex, gender, and sexual identities other than her own. However, she firmly believes that she is fighting binary thinking by being open to understanding different identities and how they negotiate

daily. Margret also believes that such discriminations are deeply embedded and institutionalised in various layers of society. She speaks of a personal experience of paying the price for being an ally:

> I am very supportive of LGBTQIA+ rights on social media. During the COVID-19, the organisation that I was working for in Colombo wanted to terminate my employment with them. I was back at home in Mannar due to the lockdown. They indirectly asked me not to come for work again. I asked them to provide me a letter of termination of employment with reasons for doing so. The director did not like it. They gave me a letter, but no reason mentioned. Later, I learned from another colleague that they did not like what I post on my social media in support of LGBTQIA+ communities and their rights. I lost my job. It is ok, I will find another one. What troubles me the most is that this same organisation pretends to be an LGBTQIA+ ally when donors pay a visit. Once, with another colleague of mine, they wanted us to speak of how much of an ally we are in front a particular donor who wanted to know more. But the organisation did not know how to answer those questions, because they do not believe in it. Nor they are an ally. However, they pretend to be in order to secure funds. I have seen the same in a few other organisations as well. They do not like to hire people from the LGBTQIA+ communities. This is the community that is mostly affected by different kinds of marginalisations. Sadly, we do not talk about them much. You are punished if you do talk about them.

Margret added that everything from seeking adequate documentation of their legal names to finding medical assistance and staff that do not abuse them is a significant struggle for trans persons in Lanka. Margret has worked in different parts of Lanka, including Colombo (the South). She has observed systemic discrimination institutionalised in various government and non-government sectors and structures. As we saw above, Margret once lost her job for speaking out and voicing such discrimination. However, she is not from the LGBTQIA+ community herself. Here she is manifesting her activist consciousness by always seeking to move forward, proactively.

Similarly, Latha shared that she had not heard of trans or intersex persons until very recently (2019/2020), and it was exposure to a few feminist collectives in the North where she first heard of different identities of sex, gender, and sexuality. She admitted that she still does not know much about this community and is eager to learn more and deepen her understanding of their lives, needs, and rights. This is another tenet of the ‘imaginaries of justice beyond the binary’ thread of consciousness: the open-mindedness to manifest collaboratively.

6.1.3 Manifesting Purposes beyond Class and Caste Differences

Jenita’s consciousness expanded when she started to work with activists from different social backgrounds and geographical locations. She strongly believed that her understanding

of social issues and different forms of marginalisation has significantly deepened through collective activism:

> My social world expanded as I actively voiced for the rights of trans people in Jaffna. I met a few women's rights activists and feminists. They opened up my thinking abilities, especially about various kinds of oppression and discrimination. I could relate to them as a woman. I was welcomed in some women activists' spaces. Our long conversations and discussions helped me grow. I could be myself in these spaces. I knew no one was going to hurt me or judge me for who I am. That sense of comfort helped me to focus on what I could learn from them. I also shared my thoughts and experiences without holding back. It helped me to grow my confidence. It also gave me the courage to start a collective for trans persons in Jaffna in 2019. We have members from the North and a few from Batticaloa [the East] as well. Around 25 of us meet regularly. We make sure that we have a good time when we come together once a month. We hope to support members to start some kind of an income generating activity. So that they could be independent. The age group ranges between teen to some in their fifties. Issues related to caste-based divisions have never come up. We are aware of it. However, we believe that it does not divide us. It is not that we all belong to the same caste. There are different religions among us. I think our struggles as trans people bring us together. We are yet to explore more.

Jenita's experiences show that learning to organise better through the experiences of various forms of discrimination, including class and caste struggles, helps to develop connections and build solidarity. She has been learning about the experiences of others who are discriminated against due to their caste or disability. This is the thread of consciousness that she wishes to manifest and explore further. This is the process in which some activists gradually transform the reactive responses to identify and explore proactive engagements (explored further in Section 6.2 below).

The awakening of Margret's consciousness due to her experiences with class- and caste-based discrimination incorporates three tenets of reactive processes that shape the activist consciousness: the inner voice, challenging the societal expectations based on discriminatory thinking, and manifesting ambitions to move beyond. I have shown above that these three tenets of reactive processes were mirrored in the experiences of other activists and how they manifest purposes beyond their differences. Like Daya and Mala, Margret also speaks of how feminist friendships have helped her develop a consciousness around these reactive processes. She sees feminisms that are shaped in the context that she lives and works from as a vital tool for developing her activist consciousness. For instance, feminism has helped her identify instances of male dominance that reinforce discriminatory values and practices in several structures such as the family, community, government, non-government organisations (NGO)s, education, and financial institutions.

In this section, I have shown how, through reactive processes, activists manifest purposes to address and challenge the differences between them. In the next section, I explore another aspect of the 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness: the manifestation of proactive processes.

6.2 Addressing a Legacy of Differences

In this section, I focus on how activists organise beyond the legacy of differences. Lankan activists manifest multiple purposes to proactively address the legacy of differences and challenge forms of marginalisation. These two processes happen simultaneously. This mirrors the experiences of many women's movements in the Global South (Paravisini-Gebert, 1997). This trend has not been explored much using subaltern theories. I argue that activists engage in proactive processes to manifest purposes beyond their differences and challenge forms of marginalisation, proactively aiming for changes, which is the second tenet of the 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness. I substantiate my arguments with the help of scholarship on cultural activism and subaltern reflections on proactive engagement with forms of marginalisation.

Anchoring my thesis in a profound understanding of the society I have long lived in, I explore what happens to everyday connectedness when the same connections are twisted and complicated by the legacies of divisions and fractures from the point of view of taking proactive measures to change such realities. Chapter 5 attempted to weave together the different forms of marginalisation the activists in this study experience. The first section of this chapter moves this consciousness to address differences through reactive measures. In the second section of this chapter, I show how activists transform beyond the legacies of difference as creators of realities based on their imaginaries of justice for all. There is a lot to learn from the experiences of activists who are conscious of this and work towards positive changes and justice when they see an opportunity.

The politicisation of the legacy of ethnic, class, and caste divisions and fractures in Lanka has been neatly captured by Neil Devotta (2004, p. 303):

> Despite their competing historiographies and intermittent South Indian invasions, the country's Sinhalese and Tamils cohabit peacefully for nearly two millennia until the Tamils realised that the Sinhalese could dominate the electoral process using universal suffrage. They thereupon consequently sought equal representation for the minorities and Sinhalese, which created ethnic tensions during the 1920s and 1930s. Interethnic confraternity among elites nevertheless enabled the Tamils to disregard their reservations and join their Sinhalese counterpart in seeking independence. Soon

> thereafter, Sinhalese elites, assisted by caste-conscious Tamil politicians, disenfranchised the country's Indian Tamils, signalling the potential for ethnocentrism and illiberal governance.

Devotta historically locates the politicisation of ethnic, class, and caste differences among Sinhalese, Lankan Tamils, and Indian Tamils while pointing out that the island's peoples have been connected beyond the legacies of differences at different points in time for different purposes. Finally, he creates the intellectual space to discuss the concept of ethnocentric governance, one of the main legacies of difference that I pointed out earlier. Hence, the activist consciousness that has emerged in response to these politics needs to be remarkably imaginative and proactive.

The legacies of colonial rule are deeply embedded in the local cultures of Lanka today and profoundly shape the consciousness of all Lankans. As a result, these legacies also have a significant impact on social movement thinking and approaches. For instance, tea plantations where the Indian Tamils had been brought by the British as slaved labourers have been famous locations where colonialism had its grip. In Part I of this thesis, I cited the work of Margaret Trawick (2007), who argues that colonial rule brought new categories of relating to one another in communities that had made it difficult to navigate across differences based on class, caste, and ethnicity. She also points out how the economic and political advancement of some Lankans was incorporated into colonial rule, creating Westernised elites on the island. This process exacerbated the gap between the privileged and the non-privileged:

> British rule and administration completely transformed the island's cultures and civilisations. Old categories were eliminated and new ones created. High-country Sinhalese, from the Kandyan area, were distinguished from low-country Sinhalese, from the rich southern agricultural area. Sri Lankan Tamils, who had lived for many generations on the island, were distinguished from Indian Tamils, who had been imported by the British to work in the tea and coffee plantations. (Trawick, 2007, p. 42)

Thus, the legacies of difference in Lanka cannot be overlooked when people come together across these divides to create and sustain imaginaries of justice. This lingering of divisions and fractures is shared by most communities/countries that were colonised and are still living with the consequences of coloniality. Although my research is located in a specific context, it is deeply connected to the history of coloniality and the various forms of marginalisation experienced in the Global South.

These legacies of division have also divided social activism along the binaries of geographical and social centres vs peripheries, producing hierarchies. The experiences of the activists in this study substantiate this: the realities of activism have created a geographical and social centre and peripheries within it, and the former have been documented more than the

latter for various reasons, including political will and methodological restrictions due to war (Saroor, 2014; Y. Tambiah, 2002; Walker, 2012). The activists' experiences show a profound desire to connect via their conscious imaginaries of justice, significantly transforming this division of geographical and social centres vs peripheries. I show below that the interconnectedness of their imaginaries of justice creates a harmonious activist consciousness amongst them. This enables them to generate potent interpretations of how the legacies of difference can be addressed so that a better future for all can be realised (Dave, 2012).

6.2.1 A Legacy of Historic Discriminations Reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic

The following account of Banu's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals the historical discrimination that she faced and how she rises above it with a strong sense of justice that she continuously works to manifest along with her colleagues. Banu's experiences also shed light on the creation of Free Trade Zones (FTZs) by the Lankan government and the discrimination and abuse of labour by big corporates that followed. FTZs are infamous for poor – inhumane at times – working conditions with fewer benefits and no job security. Given the extent of historical atrocities that countries like Lanka have gone through, including colonisation, people cannot afford to acknowledge and/or fight against the violation of labour rights or human rights in general (Hewamanne, 2010; Jordal et al., 2014):

> On a personal level, I suffered a lot due to COVID. I never returned to my violent family since I left them a few years ago. I had a part time job in a factory at the Free Trade Zone. I was living in a boarding hostel. In early 2020, the government declared a full lockdown. I lost the job. I could not afford the hostel. I hardly have money to feed myself. Returning to my family was a nightmare. Since it was the lockdown time everywhere, my entire family with their own families that they married into were at home or living close by. Like my sisters and brothers and their families. I had no way of escaping from anyone. They wanted me to come home with short hair and as a boy. I had to follow their instructions. I did not want to get beaten up again. Luckily, my grandmother's house was empty, and no one was living there. I asked my mother whether I could stay there, and she agreed. I had a few days of freedom to be by myself. One day, I forgot to change into men's clothes when I attended to someone at the gate. I went in a night gown that women wear. The person at the gate had a shock and immediately went and told my sister and the entire family. They all came to fight with me. I barely escaped the beating up of my life. I went back to being a boy to them. Just before I left home again when the lockdown was over, I told my family that I had started the treatment to medical transition. They scolded me badly and called me names. There was no physical violence this time. But I had to tell them. I did not want to keep lying to them. The woman who runs the boarding hostel knows about me too. Some men who stay at the hostel from time to time try to be funny with me at times. I show them that I

> am a strong person, and they cannot try their luck with me. You got to be strong to survive.

The sense of desperation in Banu's account is patent. The gendered discrimination of her community increased her vulnerability after losing her job during a global pandemic. However, she is still determined to rise above to change this reality through collaborative activism with others from different realities of suffering.

The activists' experiences repeatedly show that gendered discrimination was overlaid upon discrimination with regard to ethnicity, class, and caste in the Lankan context. Almost all research participants highlighted this, and my own experiences reinforce this finding. For instance, in the 2000s and 2010s I worked with activists who had been advocating for the improvement of the labour rights of female migrant workers and factory workers in the FTZs in the capital, Colombo. These women were survivors (with and without their families) of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami who needed access to shelter and livelihood assistance to rebuild their lives and the lives of the loved ones in the South. On top of this, they were also survivors of violence against women *and* ethnic conflict in the North and East of the country. The militarisation of everyday lives (Fernando, 2017) during the decades of ethnic war caused internal displacements, forced people to live in temporary tents and shelters, and increased the vulnerability of women and girls to violence and sexual abuse. The fight against the lack of social mobility of women; the issue of incest, especially in families where mothers had gone to the Middle East as domestic help (female migrant workers); the lack of women's labour rights; and the lack of women's political participation has developed a feminist consciousness that has brought activists together despite their differences based on location and background (Divakalala, 2007, 2008, 2014; Divakalala & Rajan, 2010; Saroor, 2014).

A few national-level campaigns have concentrated these efforts, including WECAN, a campaign to end violence against women; the Clothesline Project, which raises awareness of sexual violence against women and girls; and The Journey Towards Justice initiative that advocates for better access to legal justice for women and girls affected by violence (Divakalala & Rajan, 2010; Saroor, 2014). This emergent feminist consciousness has also challenged existing centuries-old British domestic violence law[6] and women's oppression within customary laws in the country. For instance, Muslim Personal Law Reform Action Group (MPLRAG) - a movement led by a group of activists and legal professionals, to change the minimum age of marriage to 18 for all Lankans [(Muslim Personal Law Reform Action Group,

[6] The Domestic Violence Act was finally passed in 2005 after a long-term intervention by women's groups from across the country.

n.d.; *Sri Lanka Brief*, n.d.) and elaborated in Section 2.2]. Some activists from the predominantly Tamil-speaking northern parts of the country where a customary law called Thesawalamai is applied showed their support for reforming the MMDA; their motivation for joining the movement included proposing reform of the Thesawalamai, which they claim is long overdue. They also connected with regard to the ongoing land rights struggle, where women's access to land is highly determined by this customary law that is centuries old and discriminates against women (Tambiah, 2002).

Over the years, my engagements with several activist groups and collectives have offered a space to create imaginaries of justice through enthralling consciousness-building experiences by addressing the legacies of difference among the activists themselves. I realised that it was not enough to dwell on one's experiences of marginalisation; one must work with other activists and be constantly conscious of how we are dealing with the differences. The activists' narratives reinforce this approach as a source of immense strength.

Activists like Mala and Margret transformed their negative experiences of negotiating sex and gender identities that are strictly controlled by society into an exploration of attitudes and behaviours towards the binary focus of sex and genders and heterosexuality at large. They began to see and understand beyond these binaries when they developed threads of consciousness based on their proactive imaginaries of justice.

6.2.2 MOVING BEYOND THE BINARY OF CENTRE VS PERIPHERY

The work of Michele Ford (2012) in the similar context of Southeast Asia reinforces the above findings. Ford (2012) provides a critical analysis of political theories to understand social movements from different backgrounds than those where these approaches were developed. Invoking the world-system theory developed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1976), Ford relates the core and the periphery through the flow of resources and ideas from the Global North to the Global South. Her work helped me to locate the activists' experiences and unpack the kinds of centres (cores) and peripheries created in the context of this research.

Ford (2012, pp. 4–6) points out the need to theorise beyond a normative focus based on popular histories, locations, and experiences:

> Scholars have tended to have little regard for the complexities associated with diffusion within and around transnational networks. Most take it for granted that resources are ideas move centrifugally from the 'core' to the 'periphery', paying little attention to the processes through which these transfers occur, and failing to recognise that social movement actors in the South are anything more than passive recipients.

In the Lankan context, a focus on transnational activism tends to avoid the impact of domestic political environments and is often accompanied by the implicit assumption that transnational activism is necessarily beneficial for local movements. This has encouraged local movements to automatically pursue opportunities to join or scale-up transnational alliances (Ford, 2012, p. 6).

Similarly, Jenita's consciousness of proactive imaginaries of justice allows her to collaborate both nationally and internationally, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic:

> I have always wanted to be a woman. But only now I understand how difficult it is to be a woman in general. It gets worse if you are from certain backgrounds. I will continue to learn and explore how we – trans persons – could collaborate with activists who work on other issues – like women's rights activists and feminist activists. I am part of a lot of online platforms. Since COVID-19, I have been part of many online discussions. Also, with Tamil-speaking people from outside of Sri Lanka. It is a great opportunity to share and learn from one another. I am still voicing the issues and concerns of Tamil speaking trans persons. The changes do not happen overnight. We hold on to our patience and continue to voice. It is important not to be silenced. We need to speak for ourselves and for those who cannot.

Jenita's activist consciousness crosses borders and boundaries by proactively identifying ways to change social realities through imaginaries of justice. Like Ford's (2012) argument that social movement actors from the Global South are treated as passive recipients of the resources and ideas from the core, Jenita's consciousness show that the legacies of difference within the Global South itself create a centre with multiple peripheries. Ford (2012) suggests that each of the political theories she critiques offers something to expand the understanding of social activism in Southeast Asia. My findings in the South Asian context reinforce the argument that complex differences are the sources of both divisions and connections for activists. They also demonstrate that the 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness helps to transform activists' lives and reshape their futures.

It is important to emphasise that Lankan political structures have enabled ethnocentric groups that are significantly influenced by class and caste divisions to continue to adversely affect the governance of the country (Devotta, 2004). This complex milieu also shapes social activism in the country, where the legacies of difference are constantly dividing – and connecting – people within and between communities, borders, boundaries, and ideologies.

6.3 IMAGINARIES OF JUSTICES AS PRODUCING SUBALTERN POLITICS

Kiran Grewal (2018, p. 55) argues that interventions, democratisation, and transitional justice programmes – both in Lanka and internationally – have been failing for the most part:

> Since the end of the war in 2009 countless debates have raged and initiatives been proposed regarding the best ways to respond to the decades of violence and to consolidate the possibilities for peace in the future. These have taken place in parallel at the international and national level. However, at both levels those communities and individuals most affected have generally been reserved the role of 'testifying survivors' – providing the raw material of their (animalistic) cries of pain that are then to be rendered intelligible and resolvable by formal actors and institutions.

Grewal (2018) substantiates my claim that subaltern voices and experiences must be understood with an openness in search of their authenticity without taking away their essence by fitting them into established frameworks and analytical tools. The first step is to stop victimising and/or any kind of victimisation in the name of inclusive or community consultations. The activist voices shared in this thesis profoundly strengthens this claim.

Drawing on the work of Partha Chatterjee (2004), Grewal (2018) expands the definition of a political society and identifies alternative sites of politics and political discourses through the cultural activism she observed in North-eastern Lanka. Grewal (2018) argues that scholarship must give greater attention to what has previously only been seen as cultural and, therefore, necessarily apolitical. She advocates for the importance of looking deeper into artistic, cultural, and spiritual practices of subaltern and popular groups that are neither the masses nor the dominant creators of political discourses. Grewal argues that doing so is both a decolonising and a democratising move. My findings show that the 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness produces a profound form of activist politics that imagines potential changes – what Grewal (2018, p. 59) calls "the imaginal dimension of politics".

Mala's experiences speak to this imaginal dimension of politics in particular. She shared her experiences of reacting to religiously defined class- and caste-based differences that are also gendered and reproduced through the sexualisation of women's bodies. She manifests purposes beyond these by constantly challenging them, first within herself and then with her family, community, and society at large:

> There is a particular temple that my family always go to. It is our temple, which is based on caste-based discrimination. We cannot go to the temples of the oppressing castes. I used to get divine frenzy (*saami aaduthal* in Tamil) during our temple festivals. It used to happen every year since I was a little girl. I realise that women and girls go into a transformative state of mind to deal with discrimination against them. When they hear

> the sound of drums, their minds focus on their potentials and what they could be if they were not restricted by this society. It gives them a transformative power to take matters into their own hands and even punish the ones who care causing them harm – again, in the name of being possessed by God. I also keep matters bottled up inside me. I did not speak against the discrimination I saw in my house, community, and society at large. Also, society thinks that women are very emotional and cannot handle serious matters or their hearts are weak and not steady like men. This was one of the main reasons why I did not show my emotions to anyone. I always put a brave face. I do not cry in front of others, which is again negatively reinforced as a go to expression of women. The divine frenzy was my way of getting it all out. When I started to question religion-based discrimination, I stopped going to the temple.

Saami aaduthal is a form of dance or bodily movement performed by women at temples and/or religious festivals. Tamils believe that God speaks to others by possessing women's bodies. Women who perform this dance enter a transformative state, losing touch with physical reality and not knowing what they are saying or doing. Mala reveals that being vulnerable with dignity is not an option for most women. It is not the norm that society assigns to women. Their vulnerability is often criticised. This takes a significant toll on women's mental health and wellbeing. Activists like Mala learn to develop an awareness of it, which is not the reality for many women.

After becoming an activist, Mala's consciousness was shaped by understanding the extent of social taboos on the kind of thinking she had discovered. It helped her to realise that the experience of divine frenzy is a space that women can claim for themselves – indeed, in the name of being possessed by God – just to be themselves, express in ways that are not usually accepted by society. Women are supposed to follow social and religious restrictions and behave only in specific ways. Frenzy is not something that is allowed to be an experience of women. Dancing and extreme movement of women's bodies in public spaces are not allowed and are usually sexualised by the male gaze. Hence women's desire to claim this space where they will not be questioned, stopped, or limited as they represent or become the voice of God. Mala's consciousness of justice evolved with this realisation, a proactive way of shaping the imagination of justice.

6.4 Subaltern Feminisms: Powerful Tools to Manifest Imaginaries of Justice

Since the 1970s, women's activism in Lanka has spent much energy on peace activism and the anti-militarisation of everyday lives of people, especially the ethnic minorities of the country (de Mel, 2007; Saroor, 2014). The eminent feminist scholar Malathi de Alwis (1997)

argues that women who were part of the Mothers' Front movement, which was formed in 1990, used maternal suffering to fight against the military to free their sons and male relatives who had either been arrested or disappeared by the armed forces. However, they did not sit at home and wait for the release of their families. Instead, they militantly marched on the streets confronting the Sri Lankan state (de Alwis, 1997). Nivedita Menon (2012) compares this with examples from the 'Women in Black' movement in Latin America, who, she says, have creatively played with this identity of motherhood in their activism.

The activist narratives in this study challenge the expectation that women's activism must promote unconventional roles and responsibilities. Just as the Mothers' Front members used their motherhood as part of their activism, trans and intersex persons are fighting for their gender identities to be accepted. They are redefining the binary understanding of gender by diversifying gender roles. In doing so, they are redefining the concept of feminism. Understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality are expanded by the 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness.

In their study of the Dalit feminist movement in India, Jahnvi Andharia (2008, p. 11), along with the ANADI Collective, highlights the following characteristics of Dalit feminist organising:

> providing for rotational and shared leadership through a consensus-building process, giving time and space to women, working on issues of sexuality, reiterating that the personal is political, and bringing what you practice to the movement and making the values of the movement your own, recognising individual journeys, celebrating strength in being a survivor, using symbols, especially local symbols and examples, and using public spaces for celebrations.

They also emphasise that Dalit feminists often engage with multiple identities; there is an awareness of the risks involved and the ways forward when faced with challenges and risks, and a profound understanding among members of a collective of the need to support one another no matter what, because the external factors contributing to their marginalisation are far greater than the divisions and fractures within.

Ruchi Tomar (2013, p. 2) argues that "three interlocking systems of caste, class, and patriarchy create a multidimensionality, simultaneity, and intensity of oppression, which is destructive to the experiences of Dalit women". My findings reinforce Tomar's (2013) statement. They are also substantiated by Sharmila Rege's (1995, 1998, 2010) work cited earlier. Given such intense marginalisation, rising up to proactively imagine forms of justice based on subaltern politics is profoundly transforming.

Similarly, my findings show that awareness of the need to search for nuances and intersecting aspects of each marginalisation substantiates the consciousness of imaginaries of justice. Understanding and unpacking feminisms from this subaltern location are tools that help to develop and strengthen this awareness. Daya explained this process neatly:

> A few years ago, I was doing activist work with feminist activists and feminist organisations. This was the first time I got the opportunity to understand what feminism meant in our local context. The feminists I met and worked with was never limited to or by issues and matters of the sexes and genders. They helped me to understand that differences based on sex and gender are grave in our society, however, experiences of marginalisations are not limited to them. Only then, I started to think about other issues and how they are all interconnected to one another. I was able to understand that no experience can be understood through the lens of a single form of marginalisation. It is never simple like that. Once you start to search for other factors influencing, you could never stop.

According to Daya, the feminism she learned from her colleagues, which emphasised that it is rooted in the experiences of women and other marginalised sexes and genders in society, is essential learning as well as something that stands out from what she had heard of feminism in the past, which was not inclusive of trans experiences. She has never stopped searching for more nuances in her understanding and articulation of feminisms – which I call subaltern feminisms in the context of this research – since then. Daya strongly believed that activism must not be limited by binary sex and gender identities and had a strong desire to connect beyond them. She also believed that moving beyond the binary helps to identify more issues and problems faced by various sections of society and understand them better. This awareness helps activists to build relationships with one another and do collaborative work in solidarity. Daya elaborated further:

> It helps me grow. These days, I'm conscious of throwing a polythene bag outside or littering. I think it is a violation against the environment, which most of us do not think about in our society. This is how I wish to start thinking about environmental justice. I do not want think big. I want to think and do what I could manage in my environment first. If we were to mobilise effectively to push our social change work, we must have a deep understanding of the problem, including those that we cause or are part of. We could be part of the problem too. Understanding the everydayness of the problem, how we all are connected with it and what kind of toll it takes on various sections of our society is vital if we were to make a difference.

Activists critically reflected on their attitudes and behaviours to stay connected to values and practices that are non-discriminatory. They questioned their own privileged positions, locations, expertise, and access to resources with the hope of creating less exclusionary spaces in which to imagine what justice looks like and how to work towards positive change. My findings reveal how such proactive processes shaped their consciousness.

Part II of this thesis discussed the work of Gayatri Spivak (2004), who argues that epistemic discontinuity happens when the experiences of the Global South are presented for an appetite defined by the Global North. The findings of my thesis speak to Spivak's concept of epistemic discontinuity by revealing that there are divisions *within* the Global South, especially based on subaltern locations and politics. The awareness of such divisions helps activists to fight reactive processes and transform them through their proactive imaginaries of justice.

In conclusion, I have argued that the long history of complex divisions and fractures between Lankans has paradoxically led to the emergence of a transformative, interconnected socio-political activism in the country. The legacy of these divisions and fractures is widespread everyday violence, such as violence against trans persons, intersex persons, and women, which is a consequence of the three-decade-long civil/ethnic war, during which the normalisation of violence was appalling (de Mel, 2007). The activists' experiences show that the post-war context is a pivotal site to learn and theorise the interactions of divisions and fractures based on ethnicity, class, caste, language, religion, sex, and gender (Devotta, 2004). The experiences and observations of activists also show how aspects of divisions and fractures are strategically transformed into points of connection to establish a shared space to bring people together beyond the legacy of differences. Their experiences illuminate how the 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary' thread of consciousness is woven through the reactive and proactive processes produced by intersectional subaltern locations and politics. The tenets of this thread of consciousness expand the interpretation of subaltern feminisms, an essential tool that shapes the imaginaries of justice.

7

THREAD OF CONSCIOUSNESS 3: POWERFUL COLLABORATIONS

As documented by Sarvam Kailasapathy, the Jaffna Mothers' Front (also referred to as the Northern Mothers' Front) formed in July 1984 to protest and demand the release of their sons who were forcibly taken away by the Sri Lankan armed forces. In 1990, the Southern Mothers' Front was formed to protest the disappearances and killings by state and non-state actors and Sunila Abeysekera noted that "perhaps a measure of the power and success of both groups (is) that their call was co-opted by mainstream political parties". Around the same time a broad network of women's groups came together as Mothers and Daughters of Lanka (MDL), its membership cutting across different ethnic and religious groups. (S. Perera, 2018)

The writing of this chapter has been influenced by the current political and economic transformations that Lanka is undergoing, especially since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. On 9 July 2022, thousands of people stormed the official residence of the country's President and the Prime Minister of Lanka as a form of resistance to hold them accountable for their constitutional responsibilities (Ellis-Petersen, 2022; Francis & Kurtenbach, 2022; 'New Zealand Sri Lankan Community Leader', 2022). There was something different about this unrest in a country that had nearly destroyed itself with a decades-long ethnic war. For the first time in many years, people divided by the differences outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 came together in protest to voice their communal suffering and hold the government accountable by demanding change.

However, while the current socio-economic crisis is affecting all Lankans, some people – especially from the North – have found it difficult to sympathise with the recent uprising. The participants in this research were, of course, also affected by the current socio-economic and political turmoil. Their activism had been speaking to structural marginalisations, especially against Tamils and Tamil-speaking Muslims in the North. As shown in Chapter 5, in addition to ethnicity and language, their activism intersects with other forms of marginalisation such as sex, gender, sexuality, disability, and caste. Ethnic minorities, such as my research participants, are careful to highlight the need to recognise the historical violence and trauma caused by the majority ethnicity – the Sinhalese – in the context of the ethnic conflict and unrest that the country has been experiencing for centuries.

For instance, the following excerpt from a recent media report shows how Tamils still feel victimised by the central government 13 years after the end of the war. Unsurprisingly, Tamils have not trusted the government for a very long time:

> "Every time we protest, they issue court orders to stop us," said [Mariasuresh] Eswari. "We have been harassed, groped and beaten by police. They use indecent language against us, and I had to be hospitalised recently after police used force against us. Military intelligence has us under constant surveillance." . . .
>
> "Where were the protests in the south when the military killed and took away our families?" asked Eswari, as she recounted clambering over dead bodies with her children in her arms as they tried to flee to safety at the end of the war. "It's easy for them to protest there, it's not the same here. When I see the Colombo protests, all I see is discrimination." (Ellis-Petersen & Sandran, 2022)

Tamil/Muslim activists' consciousness is complex, dynamic, and often contentious in the context of historical violence and trauma (Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 2013). The Tamils interviewed for the above article are still fighting for their loved ones who went missing at the hands of the Lankan military and access to their ancestral lands. In the context of the recent

people's uprising in the South, Mariasuresh Eswari points out the differential treatment of protesters based on their ethnicity and which part of the country they are from. They also reject any solidarity with the Southern protesters' Aragalaya ('Struggle by the People' in Sinhalese) movement (Ghoshal & Jayasinghe, 2022). This reinforces what I demonstrated in Part I this thesis, which is that the history of activism for various purposes, changes, and transformations echoes epistemic violence (Dotson, 2011), especially by the marginalised sections of society. These contextual insights should be kept in mind as I weave the 'powerful collaborations' thread of consciousness into the reactive and proactive processes produced by intersectional subaltern locations and politics in this chapter.

I explore three tenets of the 'powerful collaborations' thread of consciousness in this chapter: the ability to read into situations of silence and silencing, questioning dominant discourses, and a strong sense of situatedness. I also address how activists negotiate the unequal dynamics of their interpersonal relations with one another. I show the nuances that characterise activists' experiences in how they negotiate power within, between, and from the outside, and how they simultaneously navigate the intersections of everyday life (Gaventa, 2006).

Banu, Daya, Jenita, Latha, Mala, Margret, and Shanthi have grown up not only with a history of violent conflict and discrimination, but also with stories of people and groups who were and are committed to effective social change and transformation despite numerous challenges, including life-threatening ones. While there are Lankan activists who lived remarkable lives in times of war, there are also activists who have been significant actors in the local, national, and international spheres and who have mobilised and sustained social change and transformations in war-torn Lanka.

Diann Rodgers-Healey (2013, p. 67), an activist scholar from Australia, argues that women's consciousness is developed through childhood experiences of awakening to notice injustices in their immediate environment. Similarly, I showed in Chapter 5 that the awakening to identify unequal treatments – or 'injustice', to use Healey's word – is the driving thread of activists' consciousness, which continues to evolve. The desire to find common ground based on activists' imaginaries of justice (see Chapter 6) produces and reproduces critical collaborative work and collaborative activist consciousness, which I suggest is a political project.

Another inspiration comes from the work of Steve Biko (1978), who advocated for the formulation of Black consciousness in Apartheid South Africa. Biko shows that as historically subjugated groups, Black Africans' consciousness is shaped by the mistrust of the political process. Similarly, the 'powerful collaborations' thread of consciousness can be woven into

the processes of addressing and healing historical mistrust based on the historical violence, sufferings, and trauma that shape the activists' consciousness.

Contentious aspects of power relations weave into the powerful collaborative consciousness to instigate change and/or transformation. I advocate here for strengthening collaborations, which have proved effective in the recent popular uprising in the South. My research weaves findings from the literature review and my participant interviews into a metaphorical mat of activist consciousness designed to be adopted by the masses for change. In the previous chapter, I showed that the shared ideologies of the activists in this research are also grounded in their collective visions of making meaningful changes and transformations in the lives of marginalised people. In this chapter, I show that the power of collaborative consciousness brings dynamism to activism by addressing intersectional aspects of marginalised experiences while encouraging the self-critiquing of one's beliefs and practices.

7.1 Contested Power of Collaborations

All kinds of collaboration have power when people come together for one or more purposes. The aims of collaboration can range from everyday material benefits to long-term sustainable ones. According to Foucault (1978, as cited in Charlier & Panait, 2018, p. 352), "Power – expressed in multiple relationships – always involves resistance. Resistance is therefore an essential moment in the process of external norm appropriation by a local society." The collaborations of the activists in this study reflect this tension between power and resistance. They are dispersed (not linear), productive, and reproductive. They are located in the embodiments of actions, reactions, and critical innovations regarding beliefs and practices. Through their engagements with the unequal relations among themselves, the activists have learned that the very processes and conditions that subordinate them are also sources for the growth of their consciousness. They use their powerful activist consciousness as a tool to address unequal relations productively and effectively support their collective work.

Shanthi, for example, she seeks powerful connections for survival as an intersex person, and this is often in response to power struggles with different authorities and/or her experiences of marginalisation as a Tamil intersex woman from a rural part of the North who was prevented from completing high school. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Shanthi always looks for allies to be able to be someone in her community. Living in a community where she is the only intersex person, and where there is hardly any acknowledgement of intersex persons and their needs and desires, Shanthi has had to forge associations with powerful allies, including the Grama

Sevakar (GS) – the local government official accessible at the community level and on whom everyone relies for services provision and intervention programmes. GSs are influential people in each village. Shanthi learned this through her experiences of multiple displacements, living in refugee camps, and living below the poverty line. Her conscious awakening to injustice (discussed in Chapter 5) helps her to keep informed and updated on what was going on in her village and who the government officials were, such as the GS. Shanthi shares her story of how she became a social worker with a desire to work in collaboration with like-minded others:

> I became a social worker. This is how I learned to be comfortable with my body and made others see a social value in me. I help people fill out forms and accompany them to government and non-government offices to seek service provisions. I help the GS. I help people to obtain birth certificates or death certificates from the relevant government authorities. My good relationship with the GS is beneficial in this regard. I learn a lot about services, systems, and how to get things done by helping other people. It gives me great satisfaction. People come to me for help. They respect me. I have to keep doing this to earn their trust and respect. Otherwise, they will not even talk to me. I would be useless and easily destroyed due to the confused state of my body and appearances.

Simultaneously, Shanthi is aware it cannot always be positive when working with people, especially those who require support, reach out to Shanthi with the hope of getting some assistance. Some people do not like to talk to Shanthi, and others get upset with her for not being able to get them the assistance that they seek from the authorities. It is a delicate position that Shanthi navigates. She realises that people perceive her as someone with some power and authority to speak to the officials on their behalf and even influence their decisions. However, Shanthi is not part of the decision-making authority. Indeed, the GS and a few other governments and non-government officials consult her as a social worker who knows her community, that is, the needs and social status of each family in her village. In other words, the information she provides them, along with her insights, is valuable and helpful, yet, limited within the powers of a social worker who is not even paid to do this work. Although Shanthi is a respected member of her community, it is not always rosy or not that everyone likes to collaborate with her. This awareness has helped Shanthi learn from every experience of trying to help others, which shapes her consciousness retrospectively. The awareness of power within and between intersections of one's own situatedness deepens this awareness. Subsequently, the contentious awareness of situatedness in relation to power weaves the powerful collaborative consciousness as an effective incentive to instigate change and/or transformation.

The concept of horizontalism helps to describe how my research participants mobilise and effect change in their realities, and significantly shapes their consciousness of the need for

powerful collaborations. Maria Sitrin (2012) developed the concept of horizontalism from her many years of experiences with social movements in Argentina. She states that her participants described as "the most natural way to listen and to connect to one another" (Sitrin, 2012). Sitrin examines stories, voices, and possibilities within social movements and argues that horizontalism allows people to voice their concerns and desires in democratic ways. Now widely recognised as an essential aspect of their movement building, it has been used to demand self-management, autonomy, and direct democracy worldwide (Sitrin, 2012). This concept was echoed by Jenita:

> Some of us have navigated many hurdles to find ways to do the things we wanted to do. There are stories of not fighting at all and being forced to assimilate until we reach adulthood. To some of us, there were certain aspects that they could fight for and certain others that they could not. We are aware that being part of collectives and engaging in collaborative activism does not mean we fight against all forms of discrimination. What is important is that we find one another and start collaborating. There were a couple of trans persons in my neighbourhood. They were slightly older than I was. I would have been ten or eleven by then. I started hanging out with them. I felt comfortable and free to be around them. My family did not like that either.

The connections activists seek, shape, and foster in their everyday activism make this thread of consciousness powerful. A sense of connection based on similar identities and struggles contributes to this consciousness. Jenita's experiences are strong evidence of this claim.

Jenita's collaborative consciousness inspired her to start a collective for trans persons in the North. She also collaborates with trans and feminist networks from the East and the South. The collective in the North consists of 25–35 members who meet regularly to support one another. Jenita emphasised that they work to ensure everyone has a good time when organising monthly get-togethers. Their long-term plan is to support members to start an income-generating activity. This will help them to gain financial independence, which means freedom from their immediate families, who are often violent towards them. The ages of the group range from those in their teens to those in their fifties. Jenita also acknowledges that issues related to caste-based discrimination among their members have not yet come up. However, she is aware of it and has been preparing herself – as the founder of this collective – to create a space for it when it finally comes up. She realises that it will be an ongoing conversation and wants to ensure that the difference does not become a division. She is also aware that caste-based discrimination is painfully challenging to voice or share in other forums. There is much silencing around it, which I explore later in this chapter. Hence, it requires a high level of sensitivity and trust to make the activist space safe for all to share and listen to

one another. Careful planning and organising gives a power to the collaborative consciousness that can bridge contentious locations and histories.

7.2 An Example of Inter- and Intra-Ethnic Collaboration during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As noted in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous challenges for Lankan activists. In Banu's case, for example, she is still a 'he', according to government records: "I have not changed my national identity card yet. I applied. It has been delayed due to COVID-19. I will have to follow it up after the lockdown." This error needed to be corrected as soon as possible to avoid confusion or the risk of being arrested for false identification, a felony. Banu told me she will be speaking to other activists to explore how best they could address this concern and potential threat to their safety collectively.

Latha's consciousness of powerful collaborations was shaped by her artistic innovations, even during a global pandemic. Latha does not get any support from her family or wider society: "I cannot rely on my alcoholic father or sisters who are married and have their own struggles." She continues to face several challenges. For instance, people make fun of how she dresses and how short her hair is. They ridicule her because she practises creative arts and does forum theatre that aims to make a difference and/or bring about social change. They also make fun of her for doing community work when – according to them – she should be married and looking after her husband and kids.

The creative arts are not where the money is, especially those dedicated to social change in Lanka. Financially, Latha is struggling to survive. The COVID-19 pandemic has added more frustrations regarding lost opportunities due to limited mobility, lack of access to resources, and financial instability. However, she is determined to succeed in the career path she has chosen for herself, which is not a common one in her society. Latha finds her activist work therapeutic, especially forum theatre, which offers a space for people to connect and share. Her activist consciousness is driven by this determination that brings meaning to her work.

Latha has been doing forum theatre since 2015 with a local group of theatre artists. They develop well-researched scripts based on social issues. Latha prefers to research women's issues and produce scripts that address different kinds of social marginalisation women face:

> In 2020, I got an opportunity to study about film direction. We had Zoom classes during the COVID time. For a year, I studied about direction, how to develop scripts and storylines for films. As part of that course, I entered a short film competition. I filmed on my mobile phone. I have been selected in the final list. They have not announced

> the winners, yet. Towards the end of the course, I got an opportunity to work with a production house from Colombo to work on my own first film. Right now, we are doing the editing work. They gave some money to shoot the film. I have used all the money. Now, I need a little extra to be able to do the final bits and release the film.

Latha's collaboration was with a production house owned by a famous film director from the South, and luckily the shooting was completed before the lockdowns. Latha worked with Sinhala-speaking technicians without knowing the language. She said that she understood a little, however, the technicians did not speak any Tamil at all. They all managed to get through on their English knowledge. At times, others who were bilingual translated for them. Before this collaboration, Latha had worked as an assistant director on a film by a Sinhala-speaking director. Most technicians in that project were Sinhala-speaking. This was when she had the opportunity to learn to speak and understand a little of the language:

> I learned a lot by looking at them as they worked on editing, framing, and doing the preparation work for each shot. I observed everything in great detail. I did not really need the language to know what they were doing and how things are done. I also learned to make effective choices and decisions of each project. You have to manage everything, especially when you are new and work on very low budgets.

Latha felt that her interest in forum theatre and experiences working on and performing different scripts were great preparation for her transition into film-making. Her passion is giving voice to those struggling to convey their struggles, like women. She uses forum theatre and film as mediums for promoting social change. Her awareness of social issues through her own experiences and the experiences of other marginalised women increases her chances of producing work that profoundly reflects reality and has shaped her consciousness to collaborate strategically and bring positive change to the everyday lives of the marginalised sections of society.

7.3 Breaking the Patterns of Silencing

The activists' narratives express a strong connection to issues stemming from various forms of marginalisation, an awareness of how different sections of society are affected differently, and a willingness to learn from one another when doing collaborative work.

Collaborative work shapes who they are, what they believe in, and how they organise to advocate for changes. The activists do this by identifying shapes and forms of silencing that happens at various levels. This awareness reveals to them the various forms of silencing they are being subjected to. Simultaneously, there are hierarchies even within marginalised sections of society that can see them silence one another. The activists believed that it is helpful to

shatter the silences around power relations within and between collectives and activists from different backgrounds and experiences. They do this by directly addressing the unequal power relations between themselves.

The ability to read into situations of silence and silencing is a tenet that drives the 'powerful collaborative' thread of consciousness, especially in the absence and silencing of marginalised voices. This is the subaltern niche to be mindful of when theorising subaltern experiences. Understanding various levels of silencing is vital for subalterns as they continue to search for the marginalised within the marginalised. They must uncover inter- and intra-community marginalisations (Devi, 2019) by exploring every nuance of related experiences on the margin. This provides the crucial contextual knowledge that helps the activists plan their work with an understanding based on the similarities, differences, and challenges they must confront at various levels (Narayan, 1997). They do this by expanding the activist space to speak of the experiences of those on the margins.

The following account by Daya exemplifies the activists' belief in collectively challenging interconnected forms of discrimination with a deeper understanding of the issues and the reality that the toll it takes on different sections of society is intersectional. This is pivotal to understanding what kinds of silencing happen and by whom, and how to address it proactively:

> My desire is to give visibility to all kinds of marginalisations. Not only gender identities and related marginalisations but also it is important to identify other kinds of marginalisation. Then only we can fully understand the issues and problems associated with it. This understanding will help us be able to relate to people who experience various marginalisations and be part of each other's struggles in a meaningful way. I believe that this will strengthen our connection and encourage one another as well. I identify myself as a human rights defender. I am prepared to address all kinds of problems that negatively impact the human rights of the people. I think activism that challenges discrimination can be effective by having a deepened understanding of the issues and struggles of various people. These different issues are also connected with my daily life. It helps me to have a better understanding of my own issues with inequality and discrimination.

Mala and Margret were aware that their feminist activist identity causes silencing when they seek collaborations with activists who do not identify as feminists. However, most activists in this study believed in bringing meaning to feminism through their own work, which often does not follow any established or dominant framework and/or idea of what feminism should mean. In this case, it means theorising feminisms, activisms, and social justice work in general. The realisation that feminism does provide a definite analytical perspective to understand societies and yet it is not the *only* theoretical framework available, powerfully

shaped their collaborative consciousness. They had emerged from the gendered geographies of the subaltern with knowledge of the complex intersections between sex, gender, sexuality, and relationships with the state and non-state actors. Manisha Desai (2016) explores gendered geographies of struggle against neoliberal development and argues for the need to explore the local and translocal fields of protests in contemporary subaltern protests or activism. Similarly, I explore the nuances of subaltern geographies at the intersection of creating a safe space to break the silence and silencing.

Questioning dominant discourses is another tenet of the 'powerful collaborations' thread of consciousness. It refers to constantly deconstructing the dominant understanding of meanings, functions, and scopes of activism and then reconstructing what makes sense at a given time and space. The activists in this study shaped this consciousness by collaborating with activists from various parts of the country with different areas of expertise, interests, histories, and experiences of marginalisation. Examples of collaborations by my research participants include work focused on preventing all forms of violence against women and girls, sexuality and bodily integrities, environmental issues and concerns, people with special needs, and building harmonious relationships within and between communities that are usually divided by factors such as ethnicity, caste, class, language, and religion. Despite their varied backgrounds, they all agreed that questioning their beliefs and practices from a social justice point of view creates common ground for them to connect and explore.

Banu is part of a few collectives that aim to uplift the rights of trans people and others who face discrimination due to their sex and gender identities. They use the word 'collective' as these are informal groups that are not registered under any governance mechanism of the state. Most informal groups – especially those who address discrimination due to diverse identities of sex, gender, and sexuality – function as collectives, which gives them more freedom from external authorities (Saroor, 2014).

> We all work like friends. I do not have the decision-making powers in these collectives. However, we have discussion often and we make suggestions. I am very keen to work with people who believe in working together in a productive way. I am also keen to discuss issues and problems and try to find solutions collectively. Discussions also help us to plan an event effectively. I believe in working together, because it helps to understand issues and problems from different points of view. There is a sense of unity among all involved.

For Banu, having multiple dialogues with marginalised sections of society are crucial in collaborative work. It provides a sense of unity by ensuing there is space for all kinds of experiences to be shared.

Brown and Strega (2005) argue that research that empowers makes a difference at both the individual and the collective level. For these authors, empowerment "is tied to an analysis of power relations and a recognition of systemic oppressions" and there is a need to challenge the "existing relationships of dominance and subordination and offer a basis for political action" (Brown & Strega, 2005, pp. 9–10). This is reflected in the activists' experiences of building and sustaining powerful collaborations. Some of the questions that the activists reported exploring with other activists included:

i) Where does our passion come from and what drives us towards a passionate commitment?
ii) How do we understand the extent of the connections as well as the contentions brought by different contexts and experiences, especially within or between those who have been exposed to historical marginalisation and violence?
iii) How can we turn frictions into potential alliances?
iv) How do we keep the trust, energy, and momentum alive?
v) How can we keep our critical lens active, reactive, and proactive?

According to the activists I spoke with, being part of research such as my thesis is a political choice to break the silence. Banu, for example, ended our conversation by saying, "Thank you for talking with me. Research like this is important to bring out voices, seek justice, and support our activism. I believe many people will read about experiences through this research." All other participants ended our conversation on a similar note.

Activists challenge dominant discourses through self-critique and being critical of one another and their approaches. Their tool is their consciousness grounded on intersecting values and practices. The activists whose experiences illuminate my thesis challenged every norm and/or expectation of how to be an activist. They were aware that activists themselves often create such norms and expectations. However, if the expected ways of being activists and doing activism get normalised, a gatekeeping authority is set up, creating hierarchies and fear within activists' spaces. According to them, creating structures and practices that do not challenge power hierarchies within spaces mobilised by activists is unproductive and therefore undesired. The constant unlearning of dominant discourses collectively offers a profound sense of solidarity, despite the legacy of differences (see Chapter 6). The power of their collaborative consciousness paves multiple ways of being and doing – in other words, diversifying activist spaces – as they critically and innovatively handle power relations and power associated with their backgrounds, locations, histories, and identities.

The activists' critical reflections on their connections and practices create a strong sense of situatedness, a crucial tenet of the collaborative consciousness. Activists do this

meaningfully and respectfully. The desire to learn from one another produces reflexive engagements with the self and others. I call this collective reflexivity, after Spivak (2004).

Collaborations are not always positive and/or rewarding, however. Banu's experiences highlight the challenges of building a sense of community, especially as a young Muslim transwoman:

> Everything is not always positive when we work together. There is also room for jealousy. I never upload my photos on Facebook, especially where I am wearing women's clothes. Since my family still has problems with my trans identity, I avoid to be seen as such on social media. My immediate and extended families have access to my FB and I cannot bear to be violated and humiliated by them again. But I do put one or two photos on WhatsApp groups within the community – that is the trans or queer community. I do this out of trust. Sadly, one time, someone within the community has posted one of my photos on FB and that created a big problem to me with my family. I was hurt that someone from the community would do this to me. It also generated some issues with someone at the hostel that I was living at that time. They thought that I was lying and tricking them to believe that I am a boy.

The activists' experiences reveal that challenges are experienced within and between communities and are often located in particular subaltern histories and locations of violence and oppression.

Spivak (2004, pp. 529–531) gives examples of the pedagogy of the subaltern – with a conscious focus on subalterns as those who are removed from lines of social mobility. My participants, and the communities they work with, are situated in this space of being removed and pushed to the margins. According to Spivak (2004, p. 532), "The work of an epistemic undoing of cultural relativism as cultural absolutism can only work as a supplement to the more institutional practice, filling a responsibility shaped gap but also adding something discontinuous." Inspired by such scholarship, I show that the cultural interpretations of concepts that help activists to question forms of marginalisation – such as subalternity and feminism – have been institutionalised as expectations of women's activism and resulted in dominant discourses within the activist space.

For instance, Mala, Jenita, and Margret pointed out the prevailing social and cultural interpretations of feminists in their society, which they are challenging. If you identify as a feminist, people think you are lesbian, smoker, single, man-hater, stubborn, and not to be associated with or talked to. However, they stated that non-Westernised feminist thinking and friendships (explored in Chapter 8) shaped their consciousness. According to them, feminists should help them unpack the prevailing interpretations and offer an understanding of feminism that is relatable and not hostile. For example, the 'powerful collaborations' thread of consciousness allows them to recognise that one's privileged societal position may allow one

to produce a dominant discourse that is interpreted in specific ways. The awareness of privileged identities helps them to be critical of dominant discourses and challenge the same from subaltern geographies. Subaltern geographies are therefore one platform where credible knowers are produced and reproduced. They transform what is known as credible knowledge and approaches and tools to understand such knowledge from the situatedness of their collaborative consciousness (Ahmed, 2006, 2017).

Collective resistance to dominant discourses can produce a powerful collaborative consciousness with the ability to change governments, institutions, and practices (Grewal & Isadeen, 2021). The current Aragalaya movement in Lanka (Rezwan, 2022) is a fascinating example of how complicated the Lankan activist context is. The activists I spoke to, almost a year before the current uprising, were engaged in an everyday struggle to survive, let alone thrive.

Activists use different tools to listen to one another, make sense of intersecting aspects of their struggles, reflect on power relations and resulting privileges, and improve the power of collaborative consciousness. They have a crucial role to play in determining how knowledge about them is produced. There are spaces where their agencies can be explored and articulated, and where they can contribute in ways they are comfortable with. The ethics of doing, knowing, and sharing, as well as the ways of producing knowledge, are becoming better connected, produced, and reproduced (Calhoun, 2001). Studies of activists, such as this thesis, offer insights into the transformational knowing practices that are often intertwined with the complex nexuses of marginalisations activists fight against. In other words, multiple ways of knowing are produced, reproduced, and transformed along with the knowers themselves.

In conclusion, this chapter has shown how a powerful collaborative consciousness offers credible knowers the ability to transform knowledge and research practices (Brown & Strega, 2005). In a non-academic setting, the activists in this study look to understand how an issue can become the focus of their activism, how they organise and where, what is the plan of action and how is it to be carried out, who gets involved and who is left out, the reasoning behind such choices, and the power relations between the activists and everyone involved. Such a practice of critical reflection shapes their ways of connecting to the issues to be challenged and the connections made in solidarity. The level of awareness that the activists aspire to is contextually and historically situated in the intersection of multiple forms of marginalisation. This chapter has shown how activists, as credible knowers of the complexities of injustice, form, share, strengthen, and sustain a powerful collaborative consciousness.

8

THREAD OF CONSCIOUSNESS 4: CRITIQUING PRACTICES

Neoliberalism has taught us to be consumerist, self-serving and competitive. Many of us women of the middle and upper classes are content with the perceived 'benefits' of its systems afforded to women: economic independence, entrepreneurial confidence, rewards for merit and commitment, the possibility of rising to power within its structures, and most of all, the illusion of liberation from domestication. Neoliberalism, like all ideologies shaped by patriarchy, is effective in its invisiblisation of systemic power – the key ingredient in sustaining existing power structures. We don't realise we – our bodies, our minds, our labour – are merely trapped in another kind of patriarchal machine. It offers itself up as the solution to our problems, convincing us to see our problems as individual, and not related to systemic power relations and structural injustice. (Wijesiriwardena, 2016)

This chapter begins with a quote from a 2016 blog post titled "It's Really Time We Stopped Rejecting Feminism" by Subha Wijesiriwardena, a feminist writer and performer from Lanka. Wijesiriwardena (2016) discusses activism that challenges sexist and gender-based marginalisation and argues that such activism informs what feminism means in particular contexts. This kind of activism, she argues, echoes historical and geopolitical contexts with a sense of solidarity through shared political struggles and celebrations. Wijesiriwardena notes that many who challenge sexism do not necessarily frame their activism as feminist. My thesis findings resonate with this and provide profound insights into how activists manifest subaltern feminisms which continually evolve through time and space.

The activists in this research did not identify with universalised or hegemonised interpretations of feminism because they cannot be directly translated or applied in their particular contexts. My findings show that it is pivotal to look deeper to understand different interpretations of feminism and what they offer in order to envision justice and better futures for the marginalised peoples. Wijesiriwardena (2016) critiques neoliberal thinking that reproduces patriarchal values and structures, highlighting the importance of avoiding getting trapped in these manifestations. Similarly, the activists critiqued organisational structures and functions – often based on neoliberal frameworks of development – that perpetuate existing forms of marginalisation. The activists' experiences shed light on the importance of critiquing practices – the fourth and final thread of consciousness – to transform individuals and society.

In Chapter 6, I showed how activists engagements produce subaltern feminisms as a powerful tool to manifest imaginaries of justice. In this chapter, I offer interpretations of their application of subaltern feminisms. Drawing on the activists' experiences, I weave in the final thread of consciousness that produces the necessary transformations and desired growth. The final sub-research questions guide this inquiry:

iv) *Have activists been able to broaden their conception of inequality and marginalisation? If yes, how?*

v) *What is their relationship with groups and/or collectives that work on different forms of marginalisation?*

I show that critiquing practices initiated by activists paves the way to being conscious of experiences and voices that are often left out. As I showed in Part I of this thesis, the legacy of Lanka's brutal history of ethnic war still dominates Lankans' consciousness and casts a tall shadow over the other injustices and inequities of Lankan society. Hence, everything activists do to get in touch with those who have been left out of dominant narratives, even within activist spaces, is hugely important. The tool that drives them towards this awareness is the desire to

critique their practices and look deeper to reveal who is being silenced by processes, initiatives, and interventions, such as those addressing gender-based discrimination, that are meant to be making a difference to the lives of the marginalised. The following sections add further insights into how this final thread of consciousness operates.

8.1 The Need for Critiquing Practices

Due to the prolonged ethnic war (early 1980s–May 2009) and the impact of natural disasters (especially the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami), the Lankan state has long relied on the support of international, national, and local (community-based) developmental agencies to address the needs of society, especially the directly affected communities. Globally, scholars from multiple disciplines have critiqued the concept of development, with many using a top-down approach to understand people's struggles and the need for intervention in the absence of specific histories and the nuances brought out by the intersectional aspects of various forms of marginalisation (Chhachhi & Herrera, 2007; Hintjens, 2014; Kylasam Iyer, 2017; Okin, 1989). However, neoliberal development models have caused enormous challenges, including invisibilisation and silencing, for social movements, the survival of activists, and community-based activism (Divakalala, 2008, 2009, 2014; Divakalala & Rajany, 2010; Saroor, 2014; Wijesiriwardena, 2016).

In recent decades, the international institutionalisation of social movements has been systematically prioritised (Wijesiriwardena, 2016). The development approaches behind the United Nations Millennium Development Goals profoundly influenced small-scale community-based activism (Samuel, 2006). Even the usage of language changed, indicating a shift from movement-based thinking to neoliberal models. For instance, 'activists' came to be known as 'civil society actors' (Divakalala, 2008, 2014; Saroor, 2014). The focus of all interventions was slowly shifting from social transformation to short-term project deliverables. The concept of equity was narrowed down to equality, and the language of emancipation was replaced by that of empowerment (Saroor, 2014). The support structures within and between communities that had been in existence for decades were mainstreamed and started to compete with one another for funding opportunities. The movements based on ideologies, including feminist ideologies, have suffered the most. The survival of a movement is a constant challenge (Divakalala, 2007, 2014; Samuel, 2006; Saroor, 2014).

As Wijesiriwardena (2016) points out, the awareness of systemic power relations and structural injustice highlights the need for critiquing one's activist practice. The activists in this

research echoed this argument. Their experiences as people marginalised by a whole gamut of factors such as internal discrimination due to sex, gender, sexual identities, displacement, violence, caste, religion, and language (factors explored in Chapters 5–7) have contributed to their awareness of the need to constantly critique their practices when attempting to build a better future. For many activists from the North, their experiences of marginalisation have always been based on more than one aspect of their lives or the identity they carry or the one enforced on them by others. Hence, they are well qualified to seek out the marginalised within the marginalised. The tool they use in this search is critiquing their own understandings of inequality and marginalisation based on who is still being left out or is on the margins of their work. They question their own privileged positions to identify social relations of power and hierarchies among themselves. This practice of critiquing helps them to identify the layers of complexities, situate them historically, and elucidate profound understandings.

Over the years, critiquing their understandings and their activism for social change has helped them to create the space for all forms of marginal experiences to be expressed. The activists' experiences show that working within hierarchical structures is deeply limiting and discriminatory. They saw the increasing institutionalisation of activism as a significant threat to the sustainability of their own social movements. This awareness helps them critique interventions, especially those designed *for* them but not *by* them or in the absence of their voices. The activists were also critical of having to fight for limited resources and funding opportunities. They critiqued these developments as the normalisation of hierarchies and silencing practices in the activist space. Often, they expressed feeling overwhelmed and betrayed. The activists do not use the word 'neoliberalism'. However, the manifestations of their critiquing practices attacked neoliberal thinking, as activist scholars like Wijesiriwardena (2016, 2022) point out.

Feminist scholars share the same concern. Sunila Abeysekera, the late eminent feminist scholar from Lanka who worked tirelessly across the complex intersections of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, and language, argues that women who belong to marginalised communities are often faced with the detriment of having to navigate a critical sense of community and solidarity (see srilankandiasporaweb, 2011). For instance, Tamil-speaking women from Northern Lanka, being the allies of class struggles of Sinhala or Muslim women and others from the South or the East, can be treated as traitors within their own communities for allying with perceived enemies based on historical community conflicts. Abeysekera (2003) shows that some women's groups have maintained their connections beyond such divisional and authoritarian influences, and the feminist tradition of being critical of such influences helps

them to nurture their sense of solidarity (Abeysekera, 2003). The next section provides further insights on this.

The findings show that critiquing practices often commence upon the realisation of how narrow the dominant interpretations of women's lives are, interpretations that are predominantly framed in the neoliberal language of women's empowerment (Divakalala, 2005, 2009, 2014). The activists in this study had critiqued the concept of women's empowerment. They shared that it has been limited to a singular interpretation which does not actually reflect the reality of Lankan women's lives or their wellbeing. They noted that most micro-credit programmes imply that women's empowerment is achieved simply by generating their own income. However, there seems to be almost no consideration of who has access to women's income and who decides how that income is spent. The high rates of domestic violence against women are also ignored. Often, what is done in the name of empowerment only increases women's likelihood of being exposed to violence and vulnerability, given that no other aspect of discrimination against women has been challenged or changed. In order words, the overall wellbeing of women and marginalised persons is often omitted in the generalised and limited narratives of empowerment (Divakalala, 2008).

Margret shared her criticisms of many organisational spaces where she felt ignored and was marginalised for speaking up. She has also been harassed and felt violated. Margret's desire to work with non-government organisations (NGOs) was characterised by idealism – she thought that NGOs were the best tools to hold the government accountable by promoting the community's actual needs. Her idealism was based on a belief that the pathos of people's realities could inspire opportunities for positive social change. Marginalisations do not just victimise people, especially the marginalised sections of society. They also make them strong enough to practise their agency through negotiations, adjustments, and transformations. The need to work with the broad objectives of challenging patriarchal and other marginalising norms and structures and ensuring human rights through various means could not be more urgent (Divakalala, 2008, 2014). Based on her experiences of working for a few NGOs over several years, Margret said that "this idealism of mine was proven wrong a few times".

Margret identified as a feminist and preferred to use different understandings of feminism as tools to interpret her realities and work towards change. Her interpretation of feminism fits that of the feminist philosopher Serene Khader (2015). According to Khader, feminists need to differentiate between oppressive practices and those that are not oppressive based on sexism. She argues that feminist projects are those that oppose sexist oppression. In other words, she argues that the question of feminism needs to take a substantive standpoint

where the underlying conceptual concern becomes sexist oppressions. Khader (2015) also points out the need to reject the assumption shared by many Western feminists that traditions are inherently patriarchal. This substantiates my claim that subaltern feminisms show that traditions and practices are not inherently patriarchal. The interpretations can be patriarchal and normative, along with many other discriminatory ideologies across time and space.

Based on her realisation with regard to NGOs, Margret's critiquing practices started with questioning misogyny in organisational structures, values, practices, and attitudes towards women in the workplace. She has held positions such as Livelihood Coordinator, Women's Empowerment Officer, and community worker roles. Often, she was forced to quit her job after advocating for her rights and those of her colleagues. Her experiences have repeatedly proven that there is no legal protection for employees from specific identities and social locations, which, she said furiously, "is a huge problem in Sri Lanka". Her search for a job at a community-driven organisation continued:

> I did not lose faith in working for a non-government organisation. A few months later, I found a job at another organisation that work with fishing communities. My role was to support the fisher women. I liked the job as it is not a common one where fisher women get supported. Fishing is usually dominated by men. A few months later, I began to notice that financial mismanagement and fraud at the office. I collected information and made a complaint to the head office in Colombo. I have learned financial management. So, I identify when there is corruption. But the head office did nothing. I left the organisation as I did not want to support corruption or be associated with it.

Margret's experiences with several organisations have caused her to question and rethink some of the prevalent understandings of the role of NGOs, and their accountability and transparency in Lanka. In Lanka, NGOs are contested spaces with specific mandates and controls imposed by the government due to the generalised belief that most NGOs are anti-government with skewed socio-economic and political perspectives (Akurugoda, 2014). There are various kinds of NGOs, and "their involvement in local government and their contribution to local development indicate their potential role working as intermediaries to promote effective local governance" (Akurugoda, 2014, p. 14).

According to Margret, the NGO sector is dominated by heterosexual cismen from specific classes, castes, and religions in Northern Lanka. Most of them are Tamils and Muslims who speak the Tamil language. In the South, most of them are Sinhalese, and they often speak English. She has worked for several corrupt people and organisations. If you look deeper, they often come across as homophobic, anti-women, anti-trans, anti-intersex, classist, casteist, and racist. However, on a superficial level, they might seem benevolent. Margret thinks that this is

characteristic trait of contemporary Lankan society where people have learned to exist on the surface. The internal conflicts – even within the same family – on myriad issues are seldom expressed or addressed. This awareness shapes Margret's consciousness of critiquing practices. She believes this needs to change if the country wants to prosper after the three-decade-long violent conflict.

Online violence is slowly being recognised as a crime in Lanka (S. Perera & Ibrahim, 2021). A few organisations focus on finding justice for people affected by cybercrime and violence. The affected population are mostly women and LGBTQIA+ persons. Margret had been subjected to sexual harassment and bullying by her co-workers. They had misused the group photos taken for organisational purposes and used Margret's image to bully her and open fake accounts with her image. Her online privacy was violated. People also repeatedly threatened and blackmailed her. Margret made many complaints to the heads of organisation she worked at. She never got any justice. The violations did not stop, and Margret had to leave the job eventually. This raises concerns about institutionalised violence and the safety of employees from marginalised sections of society. Margret's firm belief in social and community work has never waned despite these adverse experiences. Currently, she is working for a charity organisation in Northern Lanka: "I am happy to have this job and the people who work there. We get along well." She found the job through personal contacts.

Mala's role with an informal group of environmental activists with a specific interest in voicing violence against girls and women did not turn out as she had expected. Looking to avoid working within a restrictive organisational structure, Mala found to her surprise that the informal group had a similar structure, despite saying at the outset that they were challenging power relations and hierarchies. Mala explained: "I was shocked that even a group that says that they work against some discriminatory practices could still have discriminatory values and practices towards certain other sections of our society." When Mala tried to point this out to them, she was not heard. Instead, they did things to make her feel unwelcome and uncomfortable. Eventually, Mala shared, "I stood on my grounds until the very end, and when I knew that my time spent with them was becoming very toxic and unproductive, I left that group."

Margret's and Mala's critiques of hierarchical structures based on patriarchal and other marginalising norms and values were echoed by other activists. Their experiences support the claims of feminist thinkers from various locations, and they can be seen to be making sense of feminism through their experiences of marginalisation. According to Mala, "When I met the feminist friends' group, it felt like I finally found my people and the tools to understand power

structures better. I was able to understand discriminatory values and practices in more depth." In the next section, I put some of these thinkers in dialogue with activist narratives to produce a deeper understanding of subaltern feminisms.

Daya's critiques of structural injustices are insightful, especially with regard to the Lankan health sector. According to Daya, policies and practices need to be critiqued from trans and intersex people's perspectives:

> I have worked on the national STD and AIDS prevention programme in the North. As I mentioned before, there are no statistics on how many trans or intersex persons are there in the North or even in the whole country. The only available stats is based on how people reach out for help, which we all know that is only tiny percent of the actual population of trans and intersex persons. There are grave stigmas and taboos around their identities across the country. I feel like it is more in places like Jaffna with a heavy focus on culture and religion. Also, as a result of the war, even the national census data is not accurate. There is no option to record trans and intersex persons on the form filled by the GS [Grama Sevakar – the local government official accessible at the community level and on whom everyone relies for services provision and intervention programmes].

Daya highlights that demographic information is still limited to the binary of sexes and genders in Lanka. Also, that information is unreliable due to the existing forms of marginalisation. Hence, intervention programmes cannot be based on these statistics. They have to generate their own, and most programmes cannot do that due to limited resources. In Daya's experience, only a few trans persons have changed their names and sex on their national identity cards since the 2016 circular issued by the Lankan government (General Circular No.: 01-34/2016). According to this circular, trans persons can legally change their names and sex on their birth certificates and get their national identity cards corrected. Daya stated that "there is a lot of confusion around this circular and not many trans persons even know about it."

Daya continues to highlight the loopholes in this circular. Although she thought it was an improvement, she did not welcome the fact that there is a clause that says "changed from a man to a woman". Many trans persons she works with do not like this either. Daya speaks on behalf of her community:

> We do not know why they have to mention this. We have changed, and now we are women. Why does it have to say that we used to be men? We see this as discrimination against us. This gives away the fact that we are trans, which might have negative consequences. It does protect us from being confused about how we look or behave. It is not the solution we seek. It only makes us more vulnerable.

Daya's critical consciousness has informed her decision not to transition medically. She is one of the few transwomen in Lanka who looks masculine in appearance with a moustache and a beard. Daya has contemplated medical transition for years. The awareness of malpractice

and underrepresentation of voices like hers has led to a lack of trust in the health services. Hence, Daya's choices are limited, and she is compelled to live with the challenges of living in a body that she does not associate with:

> I choose my wellbeing over my desire to medically transition into a female body. I strongly feel like a woman. I do not have to prove that to anyone by undergoing surgery. I know the consequences of medical transformation and as of now, it is not widely available in Sri Lanka. My friends and other trans people go to India to undergo this surgery. I do not feel safe to do this.

Daya reconciled this form of marginalisation with the belief that her gender identity does not have to fit into society's version of what a woman is, who could be called a woman, and how a woman must look or what she must wear. Daya said that feminist interpretations of sex and gender that she learns from fellow feminists have been helpful in this process of making sense of her gender and body. She continues to challenge the dominant understandings of the binary of sex and gender subjectivities (see Chapters 5 and 6). Daya wanted to explore non-binary ways of living in the context of Northern Lanka: "There is no one in our society who openly identifies as gender non-binary. So, my search will continue." She is not only making history by visibly exploring her subalternity and advocating for and celebrating trans lives, but also paving the way and creating space for trans activism.

Trans people's critique of the health sector draws attention to structural injustices, which also exist within organisations that are supposedly designed to help them and improve their lives. Ironically, interventions and reforms made in the absence of community voices and representation to advocate for the actual needs of the marginalised populations often cause more harm than help (Saroor, 2014). As I pointed out in the literature review and methodology (Chapters 2, 3 and 4), there is an absence of trans voices and perspectives from their subaltern locations and histories in mainstream activism around sex- and gender-based discrimination in Lanka (Wijewardene, 2008). Only recently, activist researchers such as myself have begun to bridge this gap, focusing on foregrounding trans voices and not speaking on behalf of or for them. This is reflected in the careful selection of the research methodology for this thesis (see Chapter 3).

Kaushalya Ariyarathne (2021) argues that living and performing desired genders is enormously challenging and can result in threats to one's life in situations of extreme prejudice. Despite this troubling reality, the presence of trans people-led advocacy initiatives has transformed the legal and political landscapes for transgender people in Lanka (Ariyarathne, 2021). My thesis visiblises trans and intersex voices that share a profound desire to transform

contemporary debates on sex, gender, and sexual identities with the hope of transforming society at large.

The activists' experiences show that the 'critiquing practices' thread of consciousness helps them to remain focused on the needs of their communities, unite across the legacy of differences (elaborated in Chapter 5), and refrain from coming into conflict with one another. They clearly perceive where they stand in organisational structures and representations based on various forms of hierarchies that produce discrimination. Their activist consciousness has enabled them to recognise that these structures are created by historical forms of marginalisation, which needs to be critiqued to transform individuals, communities, and society at large (explored further in the next section). The realities of historical marginalisation, as elucidated by activists' experiences, help me locate them as subalterns on the margins and peripheries of dominant discourses and practices. From this nuanced standpoint, the activists' vision of a better future does not include taking away the resources from someone else or making them unavailable to various marginalised sections of society. Instead, they wish to weave better futures *for all*, equitably.

8.2 CRITIQUE TO TRANSFORM

In this thesis I have adopted an intersectional understanding of the historically and culturally sensitive concept of transformation defined by various marginalised sections of society (de Alwis, 2018). I use Gayatri Spivak's (1988) articulation of the subaltern as the Global South's Other to locate the marginalised experiences of Northern Lankan activists. Putting such conceptualisations in dialogue with the activists' narratives, I suggest that a subaltern identity is shaped through critiquing practices based on feminist thinking and collaborations. Not all activists identify as subalterns and/or feminists. But those who do are critical of how each of these categories is defined and applied by activists. For instance, Mala identifies as a Dalit (subaltern) feminist activist, and her experiences bring the threads of conscious discussed in previous chapters together, allowing her to weave feminist friendships through constructive criticism and collaboration.

According to Mala, her consciousness around the need to critique was born from her challenging the celebration of one kind of militancy over another based on ethnic and language divisions. She thought that militancy or violence should not be the solution to anything. However, given the grim reality of historical and structural violence in Lanka, activists

consciousness must address it. Mala emphasised that nationalistic norms and values significantly shape the lives of marginalised communities, and they need to be critiqued.

Mala's consciousness of the need to critique came from questioning what was dominantly believed by a group of people – Tamils from the North – to be justice. She critiqued the portrayal of Tamil nationalism that is discriminatory towards Tamils from other regions and Tamil-speaking Muslims (Sivamohan, 2016; Thiranagama, 2011). While the dominant narrative highlights the rights of Tamil people from the North, it excludes many sections of marginalised people within this population due to a narrow definition of Tamilness, which only includes Hindus from a particular class and caste with specific educational qualifications (see Chapter 5). It is important to note that all my other research participants echoed Mala's critique of exclusive and discriminatory Tamil nationalist politics.

Mala's consciousness of critiquing goes beyond the act of providing a critique – it manifests as advocacy. "Critique in and of itself does not lead to change" (hooks, 2000a, p. 35). Mala advocates for transformation based on her identity as a Dalit feminist activist. In her experiences, transformation begins by generating a profound understanding of social problems that brings out the nuances of intersectional marginalisation. Mala locates her critiquing practices in subaltern feminisms. The practice among activists to localise meanings of feminism to fit their realities (see Chapter 6) helps Mala to form and strengthen new meanings of subaltern feminism. From this location and ideological standpoint, Mala highlights the need to transform the scopes and functions of activism.

Mala communicates such values and practices on social media platform: "Recently, I have started to read autobiographies of Dalit activists in Tamil to enhance my knowledge. There is not much. Most of them are written by men. Soon, I will start writing as a Dalit feminist activist." Daya, Jenita, and Margret also actively engage in online activism to share their ideological standpoints, challenge bullying and discrimination on social media, and advocate for attitudinal changes.

Mala's critiques highlight a conscious need to unlearn marginalised societal values and practices that are deeply embedded and difficult to identify, let alone transform. Feminist thinking and thinking with feminist friends offer her tools to do this with greater awareness. She speaks of feminist friendships as the source of her critiquing practices:

> After a few months, I made friends with a young feminist activist from Jaffna who later introduced me to an informal feminist friends' group. It was here that I learned about feminisms and how feminists viewed different social issues and how they functioned to bring changes in our society. It was a new experience for me. I learned quite a lot, and I am still learning. I started to search for more knowledge on feminist ways of

> making sense of the world and our experiences. Reading helped me to learn more about feminisms and feminist practices that challenged discriminations.

One of the questions that Mala grapples with on a daily basis is why women continue to do the things that patriarchal structures determine for us.

In her recent scholarly work, Wijesiriwardena (2022, p. 8) talks about the stigmatisation and silencing of "those who continue to be penalised for transgressing sex, gender and sexual norms" and identifies potential pathways of collaboration to advocate for their rights. Mala wanted to strengthen the call for activism that is critical of the power hierarchies that limit representation.

The conceptualisations of feminism vary according to feminists experiential perspectives of inequity (Harding, 2004). Activists and activist scholars have been influential in making sense of feminisms in South Asia (see Chapters 2 and 4). To them, feminism must be relatable and non-exclusionary, and based on different experiences of marginalisation. For instance, bell hooks (1981, 1989, 2000a–b) has been a significant advocate for combatting oppression through actions while critiquing the "exclusionary use of the term feminism" by white middle-class women. According to hooks (2015, p. 106),

> Feminist focus on self was then easily linked not to a process of radical politicization, but to a process of de-politicization. Popularly, the important quest was not to radically change our relationship to self and identity, to educate for critical consciousness, to become politically engaged and committed, but to explore one's identity, to affirm and assert the primacy of the self as it already existed. Such a focus was strengthened by an emphasis within feminist movement on lifestyle, on being politically correct in one's representation of self rather than being political.

bell hook's critiques based on feminist ideologies have been very influential and provide a critical analytical platform for further research based on contextual experiences, such as this thesis. Similarly, my conversations with Daya, Jenita, Mala, and Margret revealed that activists like them take a critical perspective on their subaltern locations and embody the same in their work amid significant challenges.

Feminist scholars Kamla Bhasin and Nighat Khan (2004) argue that there is no abstract definition of feminism that is applicable at all times. They show that understanding of feminism has been changing and evolving because "feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and action" (Bhasin & Khan, 2004, p. 4). Feminism is not limited to or by any particular sex or gender or sexuality. They argue that "according to this definition anyone who recognises the existence of sexism (discrimination on the basis of gender), male domination and patriarchy and who takes some

action against it, is a feminist" (Bhasin & Khan, 2004, pp. 4–5). My findings substantiate their arguments.

According to Daya, feminist activism works towards challenging and transforming sex-, gender-, and sexuality-based marginalisations while also addressing other forms of marginalisation that intersect and influence our lives on a daily basis:

> When I identify as a feminist activist, some ask me, why do you say that? Do you really have to be a feminist to be doing this kind of work? I tell them that I believe in feminism defined by us and that I wish to do feminist politics, which is basically what I do and how I do it along with other feminists or those who do not identify as feminists, yet.

Another widely read black feminist writer/activist is Alice Walker (1984), who is known for her work around what she calls 'womanism'" – aspects of feminist activity addressing black women's challenges. Walker (1984) argues that 'womanist' is an alternative term to 'feminist' that provides substance for women from developing countries who do not necessarily ascribe to white Western feminism to describe their collective sense of solidarity in fights for emancipation and equality. My findings show that Northern Lankan activists critique the dominant, Western formulation of feminism and want feminisms that include nuances emerging from varied locations, ideologies, and standpoints.

Nivedita Menon (2012, p. 167) makes the connection between the womanist approach to feminism inspired by black feminisms and Dalit feminisms in India: "Among Dalit women, there is a general suspicion of mainstream Indian feminism: they see it as being dominated by privileged, dominant caste and upper-class, urban feminists and their issues." Referring to the work of the Dalit scholar Cynthia Stephen (2009), who introduced the term 'Dalit Womanism', Menon (2012, p. 167) argues that it describes a different kind of politics:

> The inspiration was from Black women in the US who coined a few terms like 'Womanism' to describe their vantage point, from which they saw black men less as patriarchal oppressors and more as comrades in their struggle against racism, which white feminists were as responsible for perpetrating as white men.

My findings substantiate Menon's (2012) claim that feminists need to understand that different identities are produced at different times and in different spaces because of specific gendered processes that produce hierarchies as dominant and subordinate. Activists do this through consciousness building based on critiquing and transformation with their feminist friends and collaborators.

Jenita's experiences suggest that her conversations and interactions with feminist activists helped her to develop her understanding of critical lenses: "I learned a lot about power relations through my conversations and interactions with feminist activists. Until then, I did

not have that way of looking at my experiences and various forms of discrimination in society." She recalled resenting male privilege all her life. She has been scolded for behaving like a girl since her childhood. When she decided to transition, she came to deeply understand how men and masculinity are privileged and celebrated in her society. Jenita quickly learned that women or girls do not have the same respect, freedom, and privileges. She painfully learned that transwomen and men are at the bottom of the gender hierarchy: "The hierarchy has always been there. We only realise it when we have the exposure to expand our thinking and understanding of social divisions and discrimination. Feminist activists' spaces created that opportunity for me." Everyone in and out of these spaces listened to one another, critiqued where necessary, and worked to create a safe space for all, to challenge themselves and be challenged, and to collaborate towards social transformations. Jenita strongly believed that such an approach helps to address and transform power relations and structures built on divisional and discriminatory beliefs and values. The activists' awareness that they all hold power over someone else in the group helps them generate transformational conversations.

Daya expressed similar experiences of critiquing in order to transform: "The time I spent with feminist activists and feminist activism was when I started thinking deeply about sex, gender and sexuality beyond what is available or discussed at the surface level." She elaborated that their collective journeys of activism provided the time, space, and opportunities to be around people who questioned and challenged everything from a place of power, privilege and discrimination, including their own. This was new to Daya. She had not been in a mentally stimulating environment like this before. She also felt that it was a safe space to be vulnerable, as questioning one's own privileges can put one in a vulnerable situation. Daya shared that they had never before questioned or tried to understand the norms and practices around sex, gender, and sexuality in a way that simultaneously deconstructed these dynamics at the personal and societal levels. Although she knew that she was different from most others in her society, she had never questioned who decided these, how the choices she made were determined or influenced by society's expectations, or how she made decisions to please the societal norms and values, even unconsciously, because that was all she saw around her for the most part:

> These discriminatory values and norms are deeply embedded in all of us. Questioning and unpacking will take a long time. I am glad that my journey of doing the very same started with the exposure to feminisms and that I managed to make good friendships with some feminist activists through our collective activism.

Her critiques of health services in light of her knowledge of trans experiences shaped Daya's approach to collective growth and social transformation. For the past few years, her

work has been focused on the rights of transwomen – everything from their choice to transition to the extent of support services available to them, the challenges of accessing these services, and how to make medical and mental health support services accessible to trans persons, and what else is needed to uplift the lives of trans persons in Lanka. Daya works with many young medical professionals, including doctors, to create awareness of trans issues. She believes in working within the system to critique it and produce alternatives that work better for the community. Daya educates the trans community on updated information on service provisions and the processes that must be followed to access them. Together with the trans community, she identifies loopholes in support services and structures and reports them to the authorities, who can change the system from the inside. This is a process of social transformation that makes sense to her and her community.

Activists like my research participants draw on feminist thinking and feminist friendships to shape their consciousness around critiquing their values, beliefs, activism, and other collectives and group in the realm of social justice work. Understanding feminisms and feminist struggles in the context of Northern Lanka helps them weave a particular kind of activist consciousness. The key tool is constructive criticism – what I call critiquing practices. In this way, they learn from feminist thinking and feminist friendships that challenge patriarchal and other forms of discriminatory structures in ways that make sense to their locations and histories. This helps them to make sense of forms of marginalisation through various identities presented and perceived at different times and spaces for different reasons.

Another example of critiquing to transform comes from Margret, who is a survivor of intimate partner violence. The violence lasted for several years. The sexual harassment and online violence she experienced from former colleagues in the NGO sector subjected her to victim blaming by her partner. For a long time, Margret could not escape her abusive partner. She went on to critique the attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate victim blaming and reinforce violence as the solution with the hope of transforming society:

> I met my ex-partner through work. I thought he is a different person and the exposure of what kind of harassments and injustices that women face in our society had helped him to be a better man than most others. I learned about his true nature only later. I am an open person and I talk about sexual freedom for women. This is a highly controversial subject in Sri Lankan societies. Most people – mainly men – do not like when women talk about sexual freedom or being sexually liberated. Some of my co-workers took this for granted and spread rumours about my character. To them, I had to be a slut to be talking like this. To them, this is not how women are supposed to be or talk. Sadly, even for a person like me, it is still a talk and there is nothing that I could change in reality. My partner dominated and violated, and I could not do anything about it for a long time. Now, looking back, I am glad that I finally escaped.

Leaving an abusive relationship did not come easily to Margret. She emphasised that even those like her who have been advocating for justice for marginalised women struggle to deal with violence in their homes or relationships. When it comes to intimate partner violence, it is still a big struggle for them to break the silence around it and choose to leave abusive situations. There is a deep sense of shame around leaving a partner for women. It is not an option, and it is even more difficult when children and joint finances are involved.

In most cases, like Margret's, the partner had access to their social media accounts and can threaten to damage and humiliate them professionally. As noted above, online abuse is becoming a significant threat to women's safety. Margret commented that "there is not much work done on this. We need to do it." In her view, the worst form of sexism is exercised by men who believe they own 'their' woman in every aspect of their lives, and only critical social transformation can change that.

Margret's family did not want her to leave the abusive partner. The lack of support from family, who do not want to lose face in society, is a significant factor in women's choice to remain in abusive relationships. Often, women calculate the damage that would be caused and the struggles of living as a single woman in a highly judgemental society and choose to remain in the abusive household as that seems to be the better option. Older siblings, like Margret, are often pushed to remain in violent households with their partners, usually husbands, until their younger siblings are married off. If the younger siblings are women, the gendered pressure from the family and extended family is very high and makes it impossible to stand up against the violence. Hence, the control over marginalised sexes and genders is multifaceted. Everything from women's personal freedom and choices to bodily integrity is threatened. Many have been killed or have committed suicide, which seems like the only escape for them (Abeyasekera & Marecek, 2019, 2020; Marecek, 2005; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011).

For the same reasons, Margret said she tolerated sexual, physical, and emotional violence for too long: "He might have killed me. There were a few times it came close to that." She suffered severe mental health issues and is still appalled by the fact that despite her awareness and strong personality, she could not change her reality without support from like-minded people and friendships built on firm ideological beliefs and politics.

Margret likes to be independent, open, friendly, and dynamic. She travels alone a lot, both nationally and internationally, for work. She gets along very well with people, especially in her work communities. As I have pointed out in Chapters 5–7, her own experiences with various forms of marginalisation have shaped her consciousness of who she is, her firm beliefs in social justice for all, and how to overcome challenges and obstacles on her social justice

journey. She wants to change the gendered misconceptions of the sexes. For instance, women, trans persons, and intersex persons are seen as objects that can be violated and that exist only for the sexual pleasure of men – heterosexual men from certain privileged backgrounds. This is where she believes that learning to think through a feminist lens helped her to be critical and innovative in her engagements towards collective shifts and changes. Spivak (2004) argues that contextualised and historicised education is one way to address epistemic discontinuity based on divisional thinking and discriminatory practices. The common desire shared by the activists in this research to challenge and transform unequal structures provides insights on how one develops contextualised and historicised divisional thinking.

Through her film critiques, Latha aims to transform society into one where the human rights of all are respected, and people live in harmony and with dignity. She continuously highlighted the intersectional aspects of human rights and the need to look deeper into how they affect the everyday lives of the marginalised communities in Lanka. One of Latha's critiques challenged portrayals of widowed women as victims without any agency or a sense of self and others:

> During one of my travels by bus in our village, the woman who was seated next to me started to share her story with me. She was very friendly and spoke very politely. She was beautiful too. Her story was that her husband died in the war. Her parents got her married at a young age to avoid being forcibly recruited to fight in the war by the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam]. Once she was married, she was not a problem to her parents. She became the responsibility of her husband. When he died, there was no one. She said that it felt like she lost herself at a young age. She was still a teenager when she got married. Now, she feels lifeless. This is the reality of many women and men who were forced to get married at a young age to avoid being recruited. However, men remarry endlessly. It is never a shame on them. It is not the same for women. Widows are often ridiculed in our society, especially if they remarry. It is just unacceptable. This needs to change. This inspired me to make a short film for this cause. I use the forms of forum theatre and films to image and advocate for the changes that our society needs.

In 2021, Latha made her first documentary film on the struggles and challenges widowed women face when they express a desire to remarry. This is not an issue for men in Lankan society (Divakalala, 2014). Due to the war, there are over 80,000 widows in Northern Sri Lanka alone (Thiranagama, 2011). Latha sees many in her small village. She shared that those who remarried soon after the end of the war and returned to their village with their second husbands are looked down upon and humiliated by society: "They are always seen and treated differently and not in a good way. The ill thought is that she married twice." Latha's critical consciousness is evident in the narration of the film, which notes that the ostracisation of women who remarry lasts for generations. Finding a matrimonial match for their children from

their second marriages is a nightmare, and they often end up in unhappy marriages and as victims of domestic violence. Through her narration, Latha advocates for socio-cultural transformations for widowed women in the war-torn country.

The activists spoke about the kinds of feminism that are relatable to them. While not rejecting specific interpretations of feminism, they critiqued the kind that reinforces itself as the norm, forces them to comply, and creates boundaries and divisions if challenged. The activists shared that thinking with other feminists alongside one another – similar to the concept of horizontalism (see Chapter 7) – helps them expand their scope in terms of personal and collective growth. They were all open to being critiqued by fellow travellers and mutually helping one another grow by seeking more and an in-depth understanding of their experiences and struggles.

The above illustrations of activists critiquing to transform marginalised lives expand understandings of subaltern feminisms. They bring nuances to situated knowledge based on locations of ethnicity, castes, class, language, sexuality, and bodily integrities. The intersectional specificities from specific locations, histories, and standpoints strengthen their conceptual contributions. The tool of being self-reflexive and self-critical explored in Chapter 7 is transformed into critiquing practices that in turn help to transform marginalised lives. Like the academic exercise of taking a concept beyond preconceived notions (Mahmood, 2005; Spivak, 1988), the activists expand the understanding of subalternity through feminist lenses. The concept of feminisms gets more profound as they contextualise and historicise understandings of sex-, gender-, and sexuality-based oppression. Profound engagements with intersectional aspects within and between subaltern locations expand our conceptual fields. The subaltern feminisms produced by the activist narratives show that although traditions might not be inherently patriarchal or misogynistic (Khader, 2015), human-made systems and structures are profoundly discriminatory and need to be transformed through critiquing practices. The desire for collective growth emerges when critiquing practices are explored in collaboration.

The findings of Chapter 5 support Dave's (2012) theory of activism as a practice of ethics – activists sharing a common vision of a better future. In Chapter 7, I argued that collaborative consciousness promotes collective growth. In this chapter, I have added further insights in relation to these arguments. The findings reveal that activism shares a desire to create critiquing practices for collective growth aimed at societal transformations. Sharing, acknowledging, grappling, negotiating, and finding common visions despite their differences is another key tenet of this final thread of activist consciousness.

The activists shared their feelings and emotions about critiquing practices that helped them to connect based on shared visions of social transformation (Dave, 2012) and a desire for collective growth aimed at societal transformations. Their experiences highlight that this desire is based on the realisation that their subaltern experiences are used against them to create further divisions and discrimination. Critiquing practices helps them to unpack the influences of hetero-patriarchal and neoliberal thinking in such manifestations, building a desire to resist and produce alternatives through collaborative activism.

Scholars have highlighted a sense of connectedness across differences. On the socio-political, economic, and cultural levels, the historical sense of connection among people from different backgrounds has been systematically destroyed by those in power for political gain:

> Associational life in Sri Lanka predates colonialism and was centered on religion, culture, and the economy. Colonialism and its attendant centralised governance, especially under the British, gradually vitiated civil society's influence in the economic realm, although associational life remained vigorous in the religious and cultural realms (Devotta, 2004, pp. 299–300)

The activists shared that 'choosing their own family' through their positive community connections had been pivotal to their personal and collective growth. They have learned that often their biological family is driven by societal norms and values and is discriminatory or differential towards any family member who does not comply with them. According to Margret, "Being accepted for who you are is one of the hardest things as most people value you [as a woman] through your relationships with your partner, husband, father or brother." In her experience, people tend to understand who she is, her beliefs, and her visions for a better future through her relationships and how the men in her life treat her. Unfortunately, such an acceptance is profoundly gendered and sexualised:

> I was very religious until I started to question discrimination around me in the name of religion. I have seen malpractices by religious leaders. Some are very damaging to society. Since the time I have realised this, I have challenged them. Once I stopped a religious leader spreading hatred in the name of religion on social media.

Margret's critiquing identifies and challenges hate speech and the seeding of hatred towards the Other. In this way she builds her consciousness of the othering practices of the existing forms of marginalisation based on religion, caste, ethnicity, sex, gender, and sexuality. Margret recalled that feminist friendships and ideologies played a pivotal role in shaping her consciousness of critiquing for the better. According to her, it began with a more profound sense of self whereby she was able to understand her experiences of being marginalised as a woman from a specific class, caste, ethnicity, and location, and the experiences of others who are marginalised for various identities of sexes, sexualities, disability, and language.

Margret recalled the first time she had gone on a month-long training on various aspects of community work with a focus on feminist thinking. One of the main learnings for her was the desire to search for "local meanings of feminism" – which I call subaltern feminisms – created by the very people who are challenging marginalisations along sex-, gender-, and sexuality-based differences beyond the binary and other forms of dominant discourses such as class, caste, ethnicity, geographical location, and language. The tool that enables this is the critiquing practices that helps to grow collectively and not sabotage one another. According to Margret, "It begins with you" – the self – and is accompanied by an acute awareness of the community. "I felt like a new person every day in those 30 days when I learned a new aspect of myself through constant critical awareness of my experiences and those of my communities."

Daya also spoke to relationship between self and community:

> I believe that I need a community. No one is an island. We live in strongly knit society. However, it does not mean that I allow others to oppress me. I respect society as long as they respect me back. Since there are many sections of society that are oppressed on different levels, we need more activists and other professionals working for justice and towards uplifting oppressed and marginalised communities.

Daya felt supported and connected to activists from different religions and ethnicities who work on different issues or professions, such as Muslim activists, Sinhala activists, feminist activists, trans activists, human rights commissioners, legal practitioners, doctors, health workers, and environmental activists. Such a sense of connection helps activists to foster critiquing practices to transform society through collective growth. As Daya commented, "I get my strength from doing collective work with them or just by talking and sharing with them."

According to the feminist scholar Sunila Abeysekera (2003, p. 39),

> At times it seems as if there are more factors that divide us and promote hostility among us than there are factors that unite us and which provide the basis for collective action. Yet, it is clear that we can move forward in situations of conflict based on ethnic divisions only by working with differences and diversities, not denying them. The old slogan of "Unity in Diversity" now seems to smack of assimilation. We should rather affirm "Diversity for Unity" in the understanding that our differences enrich rather than diminish our activism and collective spirit.

She adds that "the need to develop a feminist understanding of violence against women as a continuum of patriarchal domination, and to see the links between militarisation at the state level and spousal abuse at the level of the family" (Abeysekera, 2003, p. 39). My findings reveal that activists develop consciousness through critiquing practices that help to build and sustain solidarity across the legacy of differences and the complexities of intersectional marginalisation.

A deep sense of critiquing exists within feminist engagements in Lanka, one that helps to the feminist cause to thrive and grow despite the widespread silencing of women's and other marginalised people's experiences and narratives. The activists' experiences powerfully demonstrate the kind of feminist friendships and collaborations made, and how these resonate with beyond geographical boundaries of and complicated histories of power hierarchies. These interactions also lead to more critical engagements within and between feminisms (Chhachhi & Abeysekera, 2015).

In this chapter, I have shown how the interconnectedness of feminist friendships and collaborations motivate activists to nurture their critiquing practices and work towards social transformations with a profound sense of collective growth. The findings have been compared with, and have been often substantiated by, existing scholarly work, leading me to argue that social transformations inspired by critiquing practices from subaltern locations and politics are profoundly intersectional. On this journey, multiple interpretations of home-grown feminism (Roces, 2010, p. 2) are produced with an open-mindedness to critique and a desire to transform through collective growth.

PART IV

CONCLUSION

REIMAGINING SOCIAL ACTIVISM WITH INTERSECTIONAL SUBALTERN ACTIVIST CONSCIOUSNESS

> I do not intend to undervalue contemporary LGBTIQ rights movements in Sri Lanka, which present itself as the 'liberal saviour' (Dasgupta: 2014, 439) of the transgender and other gender/sexual minorities. Rather, my attempt is to highlight the inadequacy of the knowledge produced in such spaces and the need of alternative, subaltern readings of the lives. We must start considering the achievements of the rights movements (i. e. gender certificate, healthcare support, etc) in the context of their nonthreatening nature to the neo-liberal State and the capital market which create further structural inequalities (Ariyarathne, 2021, pp. 189–190)

Lankan scholar Kaushalya Ariyarathne's (2021) doctoral thesis argues for the need to understand the experiences of trans communities from their own narrations, without essentialising and/or aiming to categorise them into existing ideological and conceptual positionings. She identifies the numerous alternative ways of producing knowledge of marginalised communities, including new histories written by young scholars of Lanka (Ariyarathne, 2021). My thesis speaks to this knowledge gap.

I have weaved a unique mat of activist consciousness with seven co-weavers, my research participants, who trusted me to do justice to their subaltern experiences and narrations of discrimination. I have put their voices in conversation with conceptual understandings based on the profound belief that community is where the knowledge is and the power of collaborative consciousness helps to expand the spheres of knowledge production from the margins and subaltern locations (Bal & Divakalala, 2022). I can see this mat of activist consciousness continuing to evolve with more colours, shapes, patterns, and contours as new activists, scholars, and activist scholars ask the questions that need to be asked to identify and produce subaltern knowledge in their profoundly authentic and insightful manifestations.

My study makes several original contributions to knowledge in two main areas. *First*, with a focus on subaltern experiences, I offer an interlocking and relational analytical framework that helped to generate insightful perspectives from intertwined, complex everyday experiences of discrimination that are often overlooked by dominant norms, values, and practices. By treating my research participants as collective subaltern knowers and doers, I have shown that they are credible knowers in the process of knowledge production. My thesis is a proof of that.

I argue that alongside the experiences of oppression exist powerful stories of resistance. This is substantiated by arguing, i) particular experiences of subalternity emerge in post-war justice movements, ii) activist consciousnesses are shaped by everyday struggles that are constantly changing and evolving as activists navigate precarious living due to multiple and intersecting forms of marginalisation, iii) activists engage in reactive and proactive processes

to manifest purposes beyond their differences and challenge forms of marginalisation, address the legacies of differences, and work towards justice and changes, iv) collaborative consciousness promotes collective growth, v) activists produce imaginaries of justice beyond binary thinking and understanding of their social worlds, and vi) critiquing practices aimed at critical reflections on the self as well collectives deepen understanding of the subalternity of social transformations.

My study helps to authentically understand the depths of subaltern experiences of discrimination and social activism. Their experiences are often marginalised at multiple levels simultaneously. The nuances of these experiences show aspects of discrimination within the context of the Global South, the national context of the war-torn country, local communities, and even families. I critique assumed binaries, presumptions, and generalisations. The limitations that I unpack between the binary of the Global South and the Global North help me to move beyond simple categorisations and offer insightful perspectives emerging from the complexities of activist consciousness and resistance.

An intersectional understanding of subalternity across the interwoven matrix of domination helps me to tease out the nuances of the complex realities navigated by young activists and explore how they shape their consciousness, which shapes their activism. I offer analytical tools that help us challenge dominant or hegemonic beliefs and practices and expand analytical fields to help us better understand society and societal dynamics. They also help us to ask the necessary questions to produce relevant and authentic knowledge. I avoided the urge to reproduce knowledge from a certain location and through specific practices that we think might fit into the popular narratives and politics of what is considered knowledge and who should be producing and reproducing them.

In her open letter to potential scholar-activists, US social scientist Laura Pulido (2008, p. 346) speaks about her experiences of trying to do justice for both her academic and activist roles:

> I realised quickly the conflict between my life as a researcher and my life as a political activist: if I wished to work with and become a committed member of those communities, this would entail a particular type of energy expenditure that was especially difficult for me-travelling.

According to the open letter, her academic self-emerged first, followed by her exploring of the potential of becoming a political activist and an activist scholar. Her personal narrative goes on to shed further light on the necessity to establish critical self-awareness and eventually clear standpoints in order to be better explorers, both as academics and activists (Pulido, 2008).

As an activist scholar studying my own community, I am familiar with the potential limitations of studying activist narratives from certain histories and contexts. I show that one way of addressing any limitation is to treat the participants as collaborators of research initiatives in the social sciences. Unlearning patterns that I have learned – that is, experiencing certain things in certain ways – helped me navigate this space of limitations. The process of defamiliarising the familiar (Sullivan, 2006) provided the space for me to be truly mindful, respectful, insightful, and innovative with the narratives that were shared with me in utmost trust and hope for change.

For almost 30 years the Tamil-speaking (Tamil and Muslim) parts of the North and the East of the country were the sites of the ruthless ethnic war that took hundreds of thousands of lives and a huge toll on the mental health and wellbeing of the region's people (Hettige, 2004a–b; Hoole et al., 1990; McGilvray & Raheem, 2007). Many lost their communities and sense of support as they migrated to save themselves from heavy shelling, bombing, and aerial attacks in one of the worst wars in the South Asian region at that time (de Mel et al., 2012). Almost throughout the decades of ethnic war, the directly affected population of this region did not have adequate infrastructural facilities, including electricity. The government also limited the supply of essential goods to the region (Abeyratne, 2004; Munasinghe & Celermajer, 2017; S. Perera, 2001; Richardson, 2005; S. J. Tambiah, 1992), which has been called "immensely militarised and socially stratified" (Siriwardane-de Zoysa, 2018, p. 4). The experiences and narratives explored in my thesis emerged from Northern Lanka and need to be analysed with an awareness of the intensity and sensitivity that results from such a detrimental context.

In this thesis, I have approached historical interpretations not just as a series or growth of events but as multiple interpretations of events that help to offer a comprehensive understanding of society (Ariyaranthe, 2021; Grewal, 2018). The practice of questioning dominant discourses and continually looking for the significance of histories produced by subalterns and those on the margins of society has kept my curiosity and critical thinking alive throughout this thesis journey.

Following inspirational feminist and subaltern scholarly work, I advocated for the need to understand the key concepts explored in this thesis – social activism, activist consciousness, and subaltern feminisms – using frameworks that speak to their historical and socio-political contexts. I explore what has been silenced by whom, when, where, and how in relation to social activism in Northern Lanka – either in written texts or in our own work as researchers. In the field of social justice research, this potential silencing becomes critical as the research and/or writing itself can be determining factors of access to justice of some form. The intersections

between the young activists' experiences and critical scholarship on gender, feminisms, social activism, and subalternity helped me to locate, problematise, analyse, and transform from critiquing to identifying constructive thoughts and practices to move forward. Such is the process that I consciously adapted throughout the research journey to pave the way towards theoretical explorations and innovations.

Second, the four threads of consciousness I offer, namely, an awakening to identify injustices; imaginaries of justice beyond the binary; powerful collaborations; and critiquing practices, are tools that deepen the concepts of subalternity, resistance, and social movements. They emerge from the subaltern experiences of discrimination as they identify, address, negotiate, and transform profoundly marginalising, conflictual, and often violating social, cultural, political, economic, geographical, and ideological landscapes of their everyday lives. The rich subaltern narratives of strengths, limitations, contours, and textures document their histories of struggles and resistance on the margins.

The first thread of consciousness is awakening to identify injustices. Carefully tracing the intricacies of this thread brought out the intersectional marginalisations lived and challenged by the participant activists across identities based on sex, gender, sexuality, class, caste, ethnicity, language, religion, and disability. I identified 'awakening to injustices' as a tool to understand the complexities each of these identities causes on their own and when intersecting with one another. Activists' narratives that shaped this first thread of consciousness offered insights into the concepts of violence, displacements, suffering, media representations, and geopolitical influences. As I have argued, the more one searches for intersecting forms of marginalisation, the greater the chance of revealing profound insights into the contours of consciousness, marginalisations, and subalternity. The nuances of the activists' experiences were sensitively woven through these chapters as I made sense of what they offer as insights and conceptual awakenings both for myself and future researchers.

My analysis continued to expand the three main tenets of intersectional thinking – history, context-specific, and simultaneity – alongside Collins's (1990) matrix of domination, which addresses the intricate workings of institutionalised power across domains that permeate society. This helped me to unpack the history of lingering divisions and fractures that result from inter- and intra-community marginalisations. From this discussion emerged insightful perspectives, which offered insights into both reactive and proactive imaginations of justice. This second thread of consciousness I called 'imaginaries of justice beyond the binary'. I argued that activists produce imaginaries of justice beyond binary thinking and understanding of their social worlds. They do this from historically marginalised identities and location, which

are the main tenets of subalternity. A more profound engagement with the concept of subaltern politics guided my discussion of subaltern feminisms as a powerful tool to manifest imaginaries of justice. The identified tenets of reactive and proactive consciousness show that more research into intersectional subaltern experiences is needed to illuminate conceptual innovations and to develop effective and contextualised policies and practices for positive changes and transformations.

The unique and significant contributions of my study have been written at a time when a profound political and economic transformation is called for by mass gatherings and protests organised by the peoples of Lanka. These are pivotal times in the history of the war-torn and deeply divided troubled pearl of the Indian Ocean. Synchronically, I wove in the thread of powerful collaborations as a vital aspect of activist consciousness. I showed that the participants' activist consciousness is complex, dynamic, and often contentious in the context of historical violence and trauma. They reported not always agreeing with other activists, and their voices and concerns could be significantly contested based on their particular histories and locations of subalternity. This awareness helped me to identify and articulate the three main tenets in activists' narratives that shape this thread; namely, the ability to read into situations of silence and silencing, questioning dominant discourses, and a strong sense of situatedness. Their examples of inter- and intra-community social activism during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic substantiate my claim that an astute awareness of the social issues and inequities among various communities shapes the activist consciousness to collaborate strategically and bring positive change to the everyday lives of the marginalised sections of society.

Breaking the patterns of silencing was an introspectively evolving journey for my participants that was profoundly interconnected with all forms of marginalisation and produced and reproduced their subalternity. Their deep understandings of domination and institutionalisation shaped their consciousness as they asked critically reflexive questions of themselves and others from the same and different social justice movements. These exchanges paved the way for them to collaborate powerfully and work together towards justice despite their differences. The practices they nurture include self-critiques and being critical of one another and their approaches. I concluded with the argument that a powerful collaborative consciousness makes activists credible knowers with the ability to transform knowledge and research practices.

I expand the existing insights into how activists' critiquing practices are contextualised and the analytical tools that activist experiences offer to understand the consciousness of

transformations. These tools are consciously grounded on intersecting values and practices reflected in the histories and locations of subalternity. I argued that critiquing practices aimed at critical reflections on the self as well as the collective help to deepen our understanding of the subalternity of social transformations. Activist consciousness is profoundly deep, with the awareness that, in some cases – especially when the internal power relations are not identified and challenged – activists' and/or activists' spaces could be a site of (re)producing dominant ways of doing, accepting, and gatekeeping the notion of social activism. The weaving of this thread of consciousness significantly relies on the tools that help activists to offer constructive criticism and sustain collaborations that make sense to them through shared politics and practices. Challenging the dominant interpretations of feminism and offering interpretations of subaltern feminisms that situate and contextualise critiquing practices and transformations significantly shape activist consciousness. Subaltern feminist friendships and collaborations transform the understanding of activist consciousness with a profound sense of collective growth. As a result, multiple interpretations of feminisms are produced from particular locations and histories of subalternity.

At the time of writing, both Lankans and people around the world are living in highly uncertain socio-economic and political times. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic persist, and I, like all of us, have a new appreciation of how quickly lives can change and be challenged by new virus variants, vaccine dilemmas, and the politics of the healthcare systems in general, and how that unfairly shapes the lives of the marginalised sections of every society of the world. The newly emerged Lankan popular movement and protests against an authoritarian state have reinforced my belief that powerful stories of resistance exist alongside the experiences of oppression. My thesis has documented some examples of such stories. Many more must be documented and researched in relation to critical theories and practices.

My findings ultimately show that activist consciousness continually evolves as activists identify and negotiate with power hierarchies responsible for producing multiple and interconnected forms of marginalisation. Activists do this meaningfully and respectfully, driven by a desire to learn from one another and produce reflexive engagements with the self and others. Their subalternity helps them to understand the complex everydayness of these experiences on the margins across time, space, histories, and geopolitics. This thesis has expanded the space for knowledge production via scholarship that tirelessly searches for nuances beyond society's dominant, hegemonic, and binary articulations. Several potentially fruitful directions for future scholarship on social activism, activist consciousness, and

subalternity that might challenge the hegemonic interpretations of society, politics, and transformations have been identified. I hope that the interpretations, insights, ethos, and politics presented in this thesis will help other researchers revisit the theories and practices of social movements and activist consciousness and encourage them to reimagine the practices of knowledge production by including the profound intersectional understandings offered by those activists operating on the margins of society.

REFERENCES

Abdou, M. (2019). *Islam and queer Muslims identity and sexuality in the contemporary* [Doctoral thesis, Queen's University]. QSpace. http://hdl.handle.net/1974/26101

Abdul Razak, M. I., & Saleem, A. M. (2022). COVID-19: The crossroads for Sinhala–Muslim relations in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *57*(3), 529–542. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096211021873

Abeyasekera, A. L. (2016). Narratives of choice: Marriage, choosing right and the responsibility of agency in urban middle-class Sri Lanka. *Feminist Review*, *113*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2016.3

Abeyasekera, A. L. (2018). Ethics and the "indigenous" anthropologist: The use of friendship in ethnographic fieldwork. In N. Emmerich (Ed.), *SAGE research methods: Cases, part 1*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526438157

Abeyasekera, A. L., & Marecek, J. (2019). Embodied shame and gendered demeanours in young women in Sri Lanka. *Feminism & Psychology*, *29*(2), 157–176. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353518803976

Abeyasekera, A. L., & Marecek, J. (2020). Transnational feminisms and psychologies: Selves, suffering, and moral personhood in Sri Lanka. *Women & Therapy*, *44*(1–2), 27–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2020.1775002

Abeyratne, S. (2004). Economic roots of political conflict: The case of Sri Lanka. *World Economy*, *27*(8), 1295–1314. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9701.2004.00645.x

Abeysekera, S. (1999). Women and peace in Sri Lanka: Some observations. *Women in Action*, (3).

Abeysekera, S. (2002). Maximizing the achievement of women's human rights in conflict-transformation: The case of Sri Lanka. *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, *41*(3), 523–540.

Abeysekera, S. (2003). Racism, ethnicity, and peace: Some initial thoughts on intersectionality. *Canadian Woman Studies*, *22*(2), 36–39.

Abeysekera, S. (2010). Addressing gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights through international human rights platforms. *Arrows for Change*, *16*(1–2), 15.

Abeysekera, S. (2012, November 27). A brutal manifestation of patriarchy. *openDemocracy*. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/brutal-manifestation-of-patriarchy/

Abu-Lughod, L. (1989). Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World. *Annual review of anthropology*, *18*, 267-306.

Abu-Lughod, L. (1990). The romance of resistance: Tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women. *American Ethnologist*, *17*(1), 41–55. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1990.17.1.02a00030

Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. *American anthropologist*, *104*(3), 783-790.

Addelson, K. P. (1993). Knowers/doers and their moral problems. In L. Alcoff & E. Potter (Eds.), *Feminist epistemologies* (pp. 265–294). Routledge.

Adikaram, A. S. (2016). "Unwanted" and "bad," but not "sexual." *Personnel Review*, *45*(5), 806–826. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-09-2014-0195

Age of Majority (Amendment) Act, No. 17 of 1989. https://citizenslanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Age-of-Majority-Amendment-Act-No-17-of-1989-E.pdf

Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822388074

Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822373377

Akurugoda, I. R. (2014). *The politics of local government and development in Sri Lanka: An analysis of the contribution of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)* [Doctoral thesis, University of Waikato]. Research Commons. https://hdl.handle.net/10289/8930

Alagappa, M. (2004). *Civil society and political change in Asia: expanding and contracting democratic space.* Stanford University Press.

Alcoff, L. (2006). *Visible identities: Race, gender, and self*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/0195137345.001.0001

Alcoff, L. (2007). Epistemologies of ignorance: Three types. In S. Sullivan & N. Tuana (Eds.), *Race and epistemologies of ignorance* (pp. 39–58). SUNY Press.

Alcoff, L. (2010). Sotomayor's reasoning. *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, *48*, 122–138. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.2010.01005.x

Alcoff, L., & Potter, E. (1993). Introduction: When feminisms intersect epistemology. In L. Alcoff & E. Potter (Eds.), *Feminist epistemologies* (pp. 1–14). Routledge.

Alcoff, L., & Potter, E. (Eds.) (1993). *Feminist epistemologies*. Routledge.

Alexander, E. (2014). Women of war. *Cornell International Affairs Review*, *7*(2). https://doi.org/10.37513/ciar.v7i2.453

Aliff, S. M. (2015). Post-war conflict in Sri Lanka: Violence against Sri Lankan Muslims and Buddhist hegemony. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences, 59*, 109–125. https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.59.109

Amarasingham, A. (2019). Terrorism on the Teardrop Island: Understanding the Easter 2019 attacks in Sri Lanka. *CTC Sentinel, 12*(5), 1–10.

Ambahelagedara, H. (2019). An exploratory study on social support and its impact on self-esteem of the transgender community in Sri Lanka. *GARI International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(1). http://diglib.natlib.lk/bitstream/handle/123456789/37392/Hansika%20Ambahelagedara.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Andharia, J., & ANANDI Collective. (2008). The Dalit women's movement in India: Dalit Mahila Samiti. *Chaning their World 1st Edition*. www.awid.org

Anbarasan, E. (1999). Sunila Abeysekera: Peace campaigner on a war-torn island. *UNESCO Courier, 52*(9), 46–50.

Arasaratnam, S. (1978). Indian commercial groups and European traders, 1600-1800: Changing relationships in Southeastern India. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 1*(2), 42-53.

Arasaratnam, S. (1981). Social history of a dominant caste society: The Vellalar of North Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the 18th century. *Indian Economic & Social History Review, 18*(3–4), 377–391. https://doi.org/10.1177/001946468101800306

Arasaratnam, S. (1982). *Historical foundation of the economy of the Tamils of North Sri Lanka, Jaffna*. Thanthani Chelva Trust.

Ariyabandu, M. M. (2006). Gender issues in recovery from the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami: The case of Sri Lanka. *Earthquake Spectra, 22*(Suppl. 3), 759–775. https://doi.org/10.1193/1.2204838

Ariyarathne, K. (2021). *(Un)framing the self: Negotiating transgender identities in contemporary Sri Lanka* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. University of Colombo.

Arteta, J. (2019). *Repainting the rainbow: A postcolonial analysis on the politics of the LGBTQ movement in Colombo, Sri Lanka* [Master's thesis, Lund University]. https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/8975740

Asees, M. S. (2015, October). *Resettlement of northern Muslim IDPs: A case study of Marichukkati Village in Mannar District of Sri Lanka*. Annual Research

Symposium, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. http://archive.cmb.ac.lk:8080/research/bitstream/70130/4180/1/M.S.Asees-017.pdf

Au, W. (2012). *Critical curriculum studies: Education, consciousness, and the politics of knowing*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203806449

Azad, Y. (2020), *Stay, daughter: A memoir of Muslim girlhood*. Perera Hussein.

Azmi, F. (2015). I want my wings back to fly in a new sky: Stories of female ex-LTTE combatants in post-war Sri Lanka. In S. Shekhawat (Ed.), *Female combatants in conflict and peace: Challenging gender in violence and post-conflict reintegration* (pp. 200–215). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137516565_13

Baisantry, K. (1999). *Dohra Abhiśāp*. Parameshwari Prakashan.

Bal, V., & Divakalala, C. (2022). *Community is where the knowledge is: The Adhikaar report*. Adhikaar Aotearoa.

Bandara, S. (2017). What factors matter for choice of livelihood among the older workers in Sri Lanka? *Indian Journal of Human Development*, *11*(2), 210–231. https://doi.org/10.1177/0973703017737863

Bandarage, A. (2008). *The separatist conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, ethnicity, political economy*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203886311

Bandarage, A. (2010). Women, armed conflict, and peacemaking in Sri Lanka: Toward a political economy perspective. *Asian Politics & Policy*, *2*(4), 653–667.

Barker, C. (2010). Interdisciplinary dialogues: Disability and postcolonial studies. *Review of Disability Studies*, *6*(3), 15–24.

Bass, D. (2012). *Everyday ethnicity in Sri Lanka: Up-country Tamil identity politics*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203097809

Basu, A. (2010). *Women's movements in the global era: the power of local feminisms*. Westview Press.

Bauman, C. M., & Ponniah, J. (2017). Christian responses to discrimination and violence in India and Sri Lanka: Avoidance, advocacy, and interfaith engagement. *Review of Faith & International Affairs*, *15*(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2017.1284395

Becker, J. (2010). Child recruitment in Burma, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. In S. Gates & S. Reich (Eds.), *Child soldiers in the age of fractured states* (pp. 108–120). University of Pittsburgh Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vkgp3.12

Berg, B. L. (Ed.). (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Allyn and Bacon.

Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2007). An introduction to content analysis. In B. L. Berg (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (pp. 238–267). Allyn and Bacon.

Bernasconi, R., & Wood, D. (Eds.). (1988). *The provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203402047

Bhasin, K., & Khan, N. S. (2004). Some questions on feminism and its relevance in South Asia. *Feminism in India. New Delhi, India: Kali*.

Biko, S. (1978). *I write what I like*. Bowerdean Press. https://doi.org/10.5070/F783017356

Biziouras, N. (2012). The formation, institutionalization and consolidation of the LTTE: Religious practices, intra-Tamil divisions and a violent nationalist ideology. *Politics, Religion & Ideology, 13*(4), 547–559. https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2012.732016

Bohman, J. (1999). Democracy as inquiry, inquiry as democratic: Pragmatism, social science, and the cognitive division of labor. *American Journal of Political Science*, 590-607.

Brass, P. R. (2003). *The production of Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India*. University of Washington Press.

Brown, K. (2017). *Mapping LGBT in Colombo, Kandy, Matara and Nuwara Eliya*. Equal Ground. https://www.equal-ground.org/wp-content/uploads/Mapping-LGBT-in-Colombo-Kandy-Matara-and-Nuwara-Eliya.pdf

Brown, L. A., & Strega, S. (Eds.). (2005). *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*. Canadian Scholars' Press.

Buras, K. L., & Apple, M. W. (2013). Introduction. In K. L. Buras & M. W. Apple (Eds.), *The subaltern speak: Curriculum, power, and educational struggles* (pp. 1–40). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203623428

Burin, Y., & Sowinski, E. A. (2014). Sister to sister: Developing a black British feminist archival consciousness. *Feminist Review*, *108*(1), 112–119. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2014.24

Butt, A. P., Kenny, L., & Cislaghi, B. (2019). Integrating a social norms perspective to address community violence against Sri Lankan women and girls: A call for research and practice. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, *29*(7), 826–834. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2019.1697777

Calhoun, C. (2001). Nationalism, modernism, and their multiplicities. In *Identity, Culture and Globalization* (pp. 445-470). Brill.

Call for solidarity with the activists who have stood up for women's rights & against discrimination. (2016, November 21). *Sri Lanka Brief*. https://srilankabrief.org/call-for-solidarity-with-female-activists-who-have-raised-their-voice-for-womens-rights-against-discrimination/

Campbell, F. K. (2009). Disability, legal mobilisation and the challenges of capacity building in Sri Lanka. In C. A. Marshall (Ed.), Disabilities: Insights from across fields and around the world (Vol. 3, pp. 111–128). Praeger.

Carastathis, A. (2016). Interlocking systems of oppression. In N. M. Rodriguez, W. J. Martino, J. C. Ingrey, & E. Brockenbrough (Eds.), *Critical concepts in queer studies and education* (pp. 161–171). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55425-3_17

Cegu Isadeen, H. (2019, May 3). பாதுகாப்பு என்ற பெயரில் இன்று புர்கா, நாளை? [Burqa today in the name of security, tomorrow?]. *Maatram*. https://maatram.org/?p=7758

Celebrating pride: Women's rights activism and LGBT advocacy. (2018, June 28). *Daily FT*. http://www.ft.lk/columns/Celebrating-pride--Women-s-rights-activism-and-LGBT-advocacy/4-657946

Centre for Equality and Justice. (2018a). *Rape and sexual violence in conflict: Definitions under domestic and international law*. https://cejsrilanka.org/wp-content/uploads/Rape-and-Sexual-Violence.pdf

Centre for Equality and Justice. (2018b). *Sexual bribery of military widows in Sri Lanka: 10 case studies from Anuradhapura, Kurunegala, and Galle Districts* [Briefing paper]. https://cejsrilanka.org/wp-content/uploads/Sexual-Bribery-Of-Military-Widows-English.pdf

Centre for Equality and Justice. (2018c). *Shrouded in secrecy: 10 case studies of sexual bribery of Muslim women in Batticaloa, Ampara, Trincomalee, Polonnaruwa, and Puttalam Districts* [Briefing paper]. https://cejsrilanka.org/wp-content/uploads/Sexual-Bribery-Of-Military-Widows-English.pdf

Chakrabarty, D. (2015). Subaltern studies in retrospect and reminiscence. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *38*(1), 10-18.

Chandrasekera, D. E. (2022, March 17). Sri Lanka's banks face a challenging 2022. *The Banker*. https://www.thebanker.com/World/Asia-Pacific/Sri-Lanka/Sri-Lanka-s-banks-face-a-challenging-2022?ct=true

Chari, P. R. (1994). *The IPKF experience in Sri Lanka* (Occasional Paper). Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security, Illinois Global Institute. https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/items/57

Charlier, J.-E., & Panait, O. M. (2018). Resistances to global educational prescriptions in the Global South: Theoretical considerations through Michel Foucault's lenses. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *39*(3), 348–364. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1351865

Chatterjee, P., & Jeganathan, P. (2000). *Community, gender, and violence*. Columbia University Press.

Chatterjee, P. (2004). Communities and the Nation. Soziale Welt, 95–114.

Chatterjee, P. (2012). *The black hole of empire: history of a global practice of power*. Princeton University Press.

Chattoraj, D., & Gerharz, E. (2019). *Difficult return: Muslims' ambivalent attachments to Jaffna in post-conflict Sri Lanka* (Working Paper No. 46). Institute of Asian Studies. https://ias.ubd.edu.bn/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/working_paper_series_46.pdf

Chaturvedi, V. (2000). *Mapping subaltern studies and the postcolonial*. Verso.

Chaudhuri, M. (2004). The Indian women's movement. *Feminism in India*, 117-133.

Chaudhuri, R. (2004). An ideology of Indianness: The construction of colonial/communal stereotypes in the poems of Henry Derozio. *Studies in History*, *20*(2), 167–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/025764300402000201

Chhachhi, A., & Herrera, L. (2007). Empire, geopolitics and development. *Development and Change*, *38*(6), 1021–1040. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2007.00448.x

Chhachhi, A., & Abeysekera, S. (2015). Forging a new political imaginary: Transnational Southasian feminisms. In R. Baksh & W. Harcourt (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of transnational feminist movements* (pp. 553–577). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199943494.013.36

Coleman, R., & Ringrose, J. (Eds.). (2013). *Deleuze and research methodologies*. Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748644124

Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of black feminist thought. *Social Problems*, *33*(6), S14–S32. https://doi.org/10.2307/800672

Collins, P. H. (1989). The social construction of black feminist thought. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *14*(4), 745–773. https://doi.org/10.1086/494543

Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Unwin Hyman.

Combahee River Collective. (1979). A black feminist statement. *Off Our Backs*, *9*(6), 6–8.

Connell, R. (2008). *Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Allen & Unwin. https://doi.org/10.22459/AHR.44.2008.04

Cooper, A. J. (1892). *A voice from the South*. Aldine Printing House.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Dados, N., & Connell, R. (2012). the global south. *Contexts (Berkeley, Calif.)*, *11(1)*, 12–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504212436479

Dalmiya, V. (2002). Why should a knower care? *Hypatia*, *17*(1), 34–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2002.tb00678.x

Dalmiya, V., & Alcoff, L. (1993). Are 'old wives' tales' justified? In L. Alcoff & E. Potter (Eds.), *Feminist epistemologies* (pp. 217–244). Routledge.

Danius, S., & Jonsson, S. (1993). An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Boundary 2*, *20(2)*, 24–50. https://doi.org/10.2307/303357

Das, M. (2022). Economic crisis in Sri Lanka causing cancer drug shortage. *Lancet Oncology*, *23*(6), 710. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1470-2045(22)00254-6

Dave, A. (2019). *Transnational lessons from terrorist use of social media in South Asia*. (Global Research Network on Terrorism and Technology Paper No. 13). Royal United Services Institute. https://static.rusi.org/20190813_dave_lessons_from_south_asia_proof_3_final.pdf

Dave, N. N. (2012). *Queer activism in India: A story in the anthropology of ethics*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822395683

Davis, A. Y. (1981). *Women, race and class*. Women's Press.

de Alwis, M. (2002). The changing role of women in Sri Lankan society. *Social Research*, *69*(3), 675–691. https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2002.0036

de Alwis, M. (2008). Motherhood as a space of protest: Women's political participation in contemporary Sri Lanka. In P. Banerjee (Ed.), *Women in peace politics* (pp. 152–174). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9788178299686.n10

de Alwis, M. (2009). Interrogating the 'political': Feminist peace activism in Sri Lanka. *Feminist Review*, *91*(1), 81–93. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2008.52

de Alwis, M. (2012). 'Girl still burning inside my head': Reflections on suicide in Sri Lanka. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *46*(1–2), 29–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/006996671104600203

de Alwis, M. (2019). The "purity" of displacement and the reterritorialization of longing: Muslim IDPs in Northwestern Sri Lanka. In W. Giles & J. Hyndman (Eds.), *Sites of violence: Gender and conflict zones* (pp. 213–231). University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520937055-012

della Porta. (2009). Another Europe: Conceptions and practices of democracy in the European Social Forums. In Another Europe: conceptions and practices of democracy in the European Social Forums (Vol. 60, pp. xix–xix). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203877036

de Mel, N. (2001). *Women and the nation's narrative: Gender and nationalism in twentieth century Sri Lanka*. Rowman & Littlefield.

de Mel, N. (2007). *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular culture, memory and narrative in the armed conflict*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9788132100072

de Mel, N. (2009). Gendering the new security paradigm in Sri Lanka. *IDS Bulletin*, *40*(2), 36–43. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2009.00020.x

de Mel, N. (2016). Playing disability, performing gender: Militarised masculinity and disability theatre in the Sri Lankan war and its aftermath. In S. Grech & K. Soldatic (Eds.), *Disability in the Global South: The critical handbook* (pp. 99–116). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42488-0_7

de Mel, N., & Kodikara, C. (2018). The limits of 'doing' justice: Compensation as reparation in post-war Sri Lanka. In D. Mehta & R. Roy (Eds.), *Contesting justice in South Asia* (pp. 39–73). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9789353280307.n2

de Mel, N., Ruwanpura, K. N., & Samarasinghe, G. (2009). *After the waves: The impact of the tsunami on women in Sri Lanka*. Social Scientists' Association.

de Mel, N., Samuel, K., & Soysa, C. K. (2012). Ethnopolitical conflict in Sri Lanka: Trajectories and transformations. In In D. Landis & R. D. Albert (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnic conflict: International perspectives* (pp. 93–118). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0448-4_5

Department of Census and Statistics. (2012). *Census of population and housing 2012*. http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/Pages/Activities/Reports/CPH_2012_5Per_Rpt.pdf

Desai, M. (2005). Transnationalism: The face of feminist politics post-Beijing. *International Social Science Journal*, *57*(184), 319–330. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.2005.553.x

Desai, M. (2016). *Subaltern movements in India: gendered geographies of struggle against neoliberal development*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315675640

Dess, N., Marecek, J., & Bell, L. (Eds.). (2018). *Gender, sex, and sexualities: Psychological perspectives*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190658540.001.0001

Deterding, N. M., & Waters, M. C. (2021). Flexible coding of in-depth interviews: A twenty-first-century approach. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *50*(2), 708–739. https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124118799377

Devi, M. (2019). Politics of intra community marginalization. *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities*, *7*(3), 901–912.

DeVotta, N. (2000). Control democracy, institutional decay, and the quest for Eelam: Explaining ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. *Pacific Affairs*, *73*(1), 55–76. https://doi.org/10.2307/2672284

DeVotta, N. (2004). *Blowback: Linguistic nationalism, institutional decay, and ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka*. Stanford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503624566

DeVotta, N. (2007). *Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist ideology: Implications for politics and conflict resolution in Sri Lanka*. East-West Center.

DeVotta, N. (2009). The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the lost quest for separatism in Sri Lanka. *Asian Survey*, *49*(6), 1021–1051. https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2009.49.6.1021

de Zoysa, P., & Wickrama, T. (2011). Mental health and cultural religious coping of disabled veterans in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Military and Veterans Health*, *19*(3), 4–12.

Divakalala, C. (2005). Beliefs and practices about the psychosocial well-being of war-affected children in northern Sri Lanka. Unpublished manuscript, Colombo University, Sri Lanka. Cited in Marecek, J. (2006). Young women's suicide in Sri Lanka: Cultural, ecological, and psychological factors. *Asian Journal of Counselling*, *13*(1), 63-92.

Divakalala, C. (2007). Women's issues/gender concerns as observed in the recovery and reconstruction processes in Sri Lanka – 26 months after the tsunami. In S. T. Hettige

(Ed.), *Tsunami recovery in Sri Lanka: Retrospect and prospect* (pp. 29–55). Social Policy Analysis and Research Centre.

Divakalala, C. (2008). *Contested notions of wellbeing: Peoples' and donors' perceptions in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka* [Research paper]. Institute of Social Studies.

Divakalala, C. (2009). *26th December 2004 and after – In search of women's narratives* In N. de Mel, K. N. Ruwanpura, & G. Samarasinghe, G. (Eds.), *After the waves: The impact of the tsunami on women in Sri Lanka* (pp. 65–83). Social Scientists' Association.

Divakalala, C. (2014). Textures of women's agency: Women making a difference. In S. A. Saroor (Ed.), *Our struggles, our stories* (pp. 152–180). Women's Action Network.

Divakalala, C. (2020, April 2). Distancing, not new to many! *Bakamoono*. http://www.bakamoono.lk/en/article/5364/distancing-not-new-to-many

Divakalala, C., & Rajan, A. (2010). *Assessment of the WE CAN Campaign, Phase II Sri Lanka report*. WE CAN Secretariat.

Dotson, K. (2011). Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing. *Hypatia*, *26*(2), 236–257. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01177.x

Durán, L. A., Payne, N. D., Russo, A., & Whalen, M. (2007). *Building feminist movements and organizations: global perspectives*. Zed Books. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350218796

Edelman, M. (2001). Social movements: changing paradigms and forms of politics. *Annual review of anthropology*, 285-317.

Ellawala, T. I. (2018). Mismatched lovers: Exploring the compatibility between LGBTQ+ identity theories and gender and sexual plurality in Sri Lanka. *Sexuality & Culture*, *22*(4), 1321–1339. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-018-9528-0

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research, 36*(4 (138)), 273–290. https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589

Ellis-Petersen, H. (2022, July 10). Occupy Temple Trees: Sri Lankans revel in overrun presidential palace. *Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/10/occupy-temple-trees-sri-lankans-roam-and-revel-in-overrun-presidential-palace

Ellis-Petersen, H., & Sandran, R. (2022, June 22). 'We want justice, not fuel': Sri Lanka's Tamils on north-south divide. *Guardian*.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/22/sri-lanka-tamils-protests-economic-crisis

Emmanuel, S. (2006). Emmanuel, S. (2006). Dealing with women's militancy: an analysis of feminist discourses from Sri Lanka. *Social Policy Analysis & Research Centre*.

Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka. (n.d.). *Discussion on the bill on amending the law related to abortion in Sri Lanka*. https://www.fpasrilanka.org/content/discussion-bill-amending-law-related-abortion-sri-lanka

Fassin, D. (2011). Suffering unveiled: Listening to the excluded and the marginalized. *In Humanitarian Reason* (1st ed., pp. 21–43). University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/j.ctt1pptmk.6

Fernando, J. L. (2017). The political economy of post-war reconstruction in Sri Lanka: development-security nexus vs. Tamil right to self-determination. *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding, 5* (1), 21–48. https://doi.org/10.18588/201705.00a024

Fernando, S., Wanniarachchi, S., & Vidanapathirana, J. (2018). *Montage of sexuality in Sri Lanka*. College of Community Physicians of Sri Lanka, United Nations Population Fund.

Fisher, S. (2009). Sri Lankan women's organisations responding to post-tsunami violence. In E. Enarson & P. G. Dhar Chakrabarti (Eds.), *Women, gender and disaster: Global issues and initiatives* (pp. 233–249). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9788132108078.n18

Fisher, S. (2010). Violence against women and natural disasters: Findings from post-tsunami Sri Lanka. *Violence Against Women*, *16*(8), 902–918. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210377649

Fonseka, R. W., Minnis, A. M., & Gomez, A. M. (2015). Impact of adverse childhood experiences on intimate partner violence perpetration among Sri Lankan men. PLoS One, 10(8), e0136321. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0136321

Ford, M. (2012). *Social Activism in Southeast Asia*. Routledge.

Foweraker, J. (1995). *Theorizing social movements* (Vol. 1). Pluto Press.

Fox, M. (2013, September 13). Sunila Abeysekera, Sri Lankan human rights activist, dies at 61. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/14/world/asia/sunila-abeysekera-human-rights-activist-in-sri-lanka-dies-at-61.html

Fraleigh, S. (2000). Consciousness matters. *Dance Research Journal*, *32*(1), 54–62. https://doi.org/10.2307/1478276

Francis, K., & Kurtenbach, E. (2022, July 12). *Explainer: Why Sri Lanka's economy collapsed and what's next*. AP. https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-china-india-asia-c9a49428e9bad5c0bb087534c0d310f8

Gamage, S. (2018). Indigenous and postcolonial sociology in South Asia: Challenges and possibilities. *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences, 41*(2), 83–99. https://doi.org/10.4038/sljss.v41i2.7696

Gasper, D., & Apthorpe, R. (1996). Introduction: Discourse, discourse analysis, and policy discourse. In R. Apthorpe & D. Gasper (Eds.), *Arguing development policy: Frames and discourses* (pp. 1–15). Frank Cass. https://doi.org/10.1080/09578819608426650

Gaventa, J. (2006). Finding the spaces for change: A power analysis. *IDS Bulletin, 37*(6), 23–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00320.x

Gerharz, E. (2019). Culture of migration: State-society relations and transborder mobility in Northern Sri Lanka. In N. Uddin & N. Chowdhory (Eds.), *Deterritorialised identity and transborder movement in South Asia* (pp. 55–70). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2778-0_4

Ghoshal, D., & Jayasinghe, U. (2022, July 13). *How a band of activists helped bring down Sri Lanka's government*. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/how-band-activists-helped-bring-down-sri-lankas-government-2022-07-11/

Gidla, S. (2017). *Ants among elephants: An untouchable family and the making of modern India*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Gidwani, V. (2009). Subalternity. In *International encyclopedia of human geography* (Vol. 11, pp. 65–71). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00542-3

Gines, K. T. (2015). Ruminations on twenty-five years of Patricia Hill Collins's black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 38*(13), 2341–2348. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1058505

Goodhand, J., Klem, B., & Korf, B. (2009). Religion, conflict and boundary politics in Sri Lanka. *European Journal of Development Research, 21*(5), 679–698. https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2009.41

Goodhand, J., Korf, B., & Spencer, J. (Eds.). (2010). *Conflict and peacebuilding in Sri Lanka: Caught in the peace trap?* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203838242

Goodwin, J., & Jasper, J. M. (1999, March). Caught in a winding, snarling vine: The structural bias of political process theory. In *Sociological forum* (Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 27-54). Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers.

Gopal, M. (2015). Struggles around gender: Some clarifications. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *50*(33), 76–77.

Gowrinathan, N. (2016). On culture and commentary: The writings of Meena Kandasamy. *Indian Journal of Women*, *1*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1177/2455632716648785

Gowrinathan, N., & Mampilly, Z. (2019). Resistance and repression under the rule of rebels: Women, clergy, and civilian agency in LTTE governed Sri Lanka. *Comparative Politics*, *52*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.5129/001041519X15698352040097

Grewal, K. K. (2015). International criminal law as a site for enhancing women's rights? Challenges, possibilities, strategies. *Feminist Legal Studies*, *23*(2), 149–165. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-015-9286-4

Grewal, K. K. (2018). Politics beyond institutions: The creation of new social imaginaries in post-war Sri Lanka. *Social Alternatives*, *37*(4), 55–59.

Grewal, K., & Isadeen, H. C. (2021). "5: Between the Nationalists and the Fundamentalists, Still We Have Hope!". In *Dystopian Emotions*. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press.

Guha, R., & Spivak, G. (Eds.). (1988). *Selected subaltern studies*. Oxford University Press.

Hale, C. R. (2008). *Engaging contradictions theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship*. University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520916173

Haniffa, F. (2016). Stories in the aftermath of Aluthgama. In J. Holt (Ed.), *Buddhist extremists and Muslim minorities: Religious conflict in contemporary Sri Lanka* (pp. 164–193). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190624378.003.0008

Haniffa, F., Amarasuriya, H., Wijenayake, V., & Gunatillake, G. (2014). *Where have all the neighbours gone?: Aluthgama riots and its aftermath: A fact finding mission to Aluthgama, Dharga Town, Valipanna, and Beruwela*. Law & Society Trust.

Harcourt, W. (2012). Crossborder feminisms: Wendy Harcourt in conversation with Srilatha Batliwala, Sunila Abeysekera and Rawwida Baksh. *Development*, *55*(2), 190–197. https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2012.12

Harding, S. (1987). The method question. *Hypatia*, *2*(3), 19–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1987.tb01339.x

Harding, S. (1989). Is there a feminist method? In N. Tuana (Ed.), *Feminism and science*, (pp. 18–32). Indiana University Press.

Harding, S. (1990). Feminism and theories of scientific knowledge. *Women: A Cultural Review*, *1*(1), 87–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/09574049008578026

Harding, S. (2004). A socially relevant philosophy of science? Resources from standpoint theory's controversiality. *Hypatia, 19*(1), 25–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2004.tb01267.x

Harding, S. (2008). How many epistemologies should guide the production of scientific knowledge? A response to Maffie, Mendieta, and Wylie. *Hypatia, 23*(4), 212–219. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2008.tb01442.x

Harris, S. (2004). Gender, participation, and post-conflict planning in northern Sri Lanka. *Gender & Development*, *12*(3), 60–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070412331332320

Herath, S. (2015). Language policy, ethnic tensions and linguistic rights in post war Sri Lanka. *Language Policy*, *14*(3), 245–261. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-014-9339-6

Hettige, S. T. (2004a). Economic policy, changing opportunities for youth, and the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. In D. Winslow & M. D. Woost (Eds.), *Economy, culture, and civil war in Sri Lanka* (pp. 115–131). Indiana University Press.

Hettige, S. T. (2004b, July 6–9). *From social justice to market competition: Impact of globalization on education in Sri Lanka* [Paper presentation].18th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Lund University, Sweden.

Hewamanne, S. (2006). Pornographic voice: Critical feminist practices among Sri Lanka's female garment workers. *Feminist Studies*, *32*(1), 125–154. https://doi.org/10.2307/20459075

Hewamanne, S. (2009). Duty bound? Militarization, romances, and new forms of violence among Sri Lanka's Free Trade Zone factory workers. *Cultural Dynamics*, *21*(2), 153–184. https://doi.org/10.1177/0921374008105069

Hewamanne, S. (2010). *Stitching identities in a Free Trade Zone: Gender and politics in Sri Lanka.* University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hintjens, H. (2014). "As if there were two Rwandas": Polarised research agendas in post-genocide Rwanda. In H. Hintjens & D. Zarkov (Eds.), *Conflict, peace, security and development: Theories and methodologies* (pp. 134–149). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203749838

Höglund, K., & Orjuela, C. (2011). Winning the peace: Conflict prevention after a victor's peace in Sri Lanka. *Contemporary Social Science*, *6*(1), 19–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450144.2010.534491

Hodgson, & Brooks, E. (2007). Introduction: Activisms. Women's Studies Quarterly, 35(3/4), 14–25.

Hollway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2013). *Doing qualitative research differently: A psychosocial approach* (2nd ed.). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402233

hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a woman? Black women and feminism*. South End Press.

hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist criticism: From margin to center*. South End Press.

hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. South End Press.

hooks, b. (2000a). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Routledge.

hooks, b. (2000b). *Feminist theory: From margin to center* (2nd. ed.). Pluto Press.

hooks, b. (2004). *The will to change: Men, masculinity, and love.* Washington Square Press.

hooks, b. (2009). *Belonging: A culture of place*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203888018

hooks, b (2015). Outlaw culture: resisting representations. Routledge.

Hoole, R., Somasundaram, D., Sritharan, K., & Thiranagama, R. (1990). *The broken palmyra: The Tamil crisis in Sri Lanka – an inside account*. Sri Lanka Studies Institute.

Hughes, D. (2013). *Violence, torture and memory in Sri Lanka*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203771464

Hulko, W. (2009). The time- and context-contingent nature of intersectionality and interlocking oppressions. *Affilia*, *24*(1), 44–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109908326814

Human Rights Watch. (2022, May 10). *Sri Lanka: Government backers attack peaceful protesters*. https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/10/sri-lanka-government-backers-attack-peaceful-protesters

Hyndman, J., & de Alwis, M. (2003). Beyond gender: Towards a feminist analysis of humanitarianism and development in Sri Lanka. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *31*(3–4), 212–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369042000307960

Hyndman, J., & de Alwis, M. (2004). Bodies, shrines, and roads: Violence, (im)mobility and displacement in Sri Lanka. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *11*(4), 535–557.

Wells-Barnett, I. B. (1991). *Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett*. Oxford University Press on Demand.

Imtiyaz, A. R. M. (2020). The Easter Sunday bombings and the crisis facing Sri Lanka's Muslims. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *55*(1), 3–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909619868244

Imtiyaz, A. R. M., & Mohamed-Saleem, A. (2015). Muslims in post-war Sri Lanka: Understanding Sinhala-Buddhist mobilization against them. *Asian Ethnicity*, *16*(2), 186–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2015.1003691

India helps Sri Lanka resolve fuel crisis. (2022, March 20). *Maritime Gateway*. https://www.maritimegateway.com/india-helps-sri-lanka-resolve-fuel-crisis/

International Planned Parenthood Federation. (2019, February 27). *Fighting for safe abortion access in Sri Lanka*. https://www.ippf.org/blogs/fighting-safe-abortion-access-sri-lanka

Isaacs, T. (2016, August 21). [Review of the book *Existential eroticism: A feminist approach to understanding women's oppression-perpetuating choices*, by S. Welch]. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*. https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/existential-eroticism-a-feminist-approach-to-understanding-womens-oppression-perpetuating-choices/

Isadeen. H. C & Hamin, H. (2016). 'Unequal citizens: Muslim women's struggle for justice and equality in Sri Lanka'. *Muslim Personal Law Reform Action Group (MPLRAG).* https://mplreforms.com/unequal-citizens-study/

Ismail. Q. M. (1985). Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict and Muslims. *Economic and Political Weekly, 20* (19), 830–833.

Ismail, Q. M. (2000). Constituting nation, Contesting nationalism: The southern Tamil (woman) and separatist Tamil nationalism. *Subaltern Studies, 11*, 212–283.

Ismail, Q. M. (2005). *Abiding by Sri Lanka: on peace, place, and postcoloniality*. University of Minnesota Press.

Ismail, Q. M., & Jeganathan, P. (Eds.). (1995). *Unmaking the nation: The politics of identity and history in modern Sri Lanka*. Social Scientists' Association.

Jalušič, V. (2010). Theorising complex inequalities to meet the challenges of intervention against violence. In C. Hagemann-White, L. Kelly, & T. Meysen (Eds.), *Interventions against child abuse and violence against women* (pp. 28–48). Verlag Barbara Budrich. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvr7fcsw.5

Jayachandra, M. (2010). Asia-Pacific: gender roles through coloured spectacles. Alternative Law Journal, 35(3), 172–173. https://doi.org/10.1177/1037969X1003500311

Jayarathne, K. L. (2017). Key actors in agenda-setting on LGBTQ rights: Positive and negative role. *KDU Library*. http://192.248.104.6/bitstream/handle/345/1872/015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Jayasundara-Smits, S. (2022). *An Uneasy Hegemony: Politics of State-building and Struggles for Justice in Sri Lanka* (South Asia in the Social Sciences). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781009199230

Jayasuriya, V., Wijewardena, K., & Axemo, P. (2011). Intimate partner violence against women in the capital province of Sri Lanka: Prevalence, risk factors, and help seeking. Violence Against Women, 17(8), 1086–1102. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801211417151

Jayawardena, K. (1970). Economic and political factors in the 1915 riots. *Journal of Asian Studies, 29*(2), 223–233. https://doi.org/10.2307/2942622

Jayawardena, K. (1972). *The rise of the labour movement in Ceylon*. Duke University Press.

Jayawardena, K. (1984). Class formation and communalism. *Race & Class, 26*(1), 51–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/030639688402600104

Jayawardena, K. (2000). *Nobodies to somebodies: The rise of the colonial bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka.* Social Scientists' Association.

Jayawardena, K. (2009). *Feminism and nationalism in the Third World*. Social Scientists Association.

Jayawardena, K. (2014). *The white woman's other burden: Western women and South Asia during British rule*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315021829

Jayawardena, K., & de Alwis, M. (1996). Communalising women's sexuality in South Asia. *Reproductive Health Matters, 8*, 162–166. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(96)90372-9

Jayawardena, K., & de Alwis, M. (2002). The contingent politics of the women's movement in Sri Lanka after independence. In J. Swarma (Ed.), *Women in post-independence Sri Lanka* (p. 245). SAGE.

Jayawardena, K., & Kelkar, G. (1989). The Left and feminism. *Economic and Political Weekly, 24*(38), 2123–2126.

Jayawardena, K., & Kurian, R. (2015). *Class, patriarchy and ethnicity on Sri Lankan plantations: Two centuries of power and protest*. Orient BlackSwan.

Jayawardena, K., & Pinto-Jayawardena, K. (Eds.). (2016). *The search for justice: The Sri Lanka papers*. Zubaan.

Jayewardene, S. (2017). *The line of Lanka: Myths and memories of an island*. Sailfish.

Jiggins, J. (1979). *Caste and family in the politics of the Sinhalese 1947–1976*. Cambridge University Press.

John, M. E. (2015). Intersectionality: Rejection or critical dialogue? *Economic and Political Weekly*, *50*(33), 72–76.

Jordal, M., Wijewardena, K., Öhman, A., Essén, B., & Olsson, P. (2014). Negotiating respectability: Migrant women workers' perceptions of relationships and sexuality in Free Trade Zones in Sri Lanka. *Health Care for Women International*, *35*(6), 658–676. https://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2013.862799

Kabeer, N. (1994). *Reversed realities: Gender hierarchies in development thought*. Verso.

Kadirgamar, A. (2013). The question of militarisation in post-war Sri Lanka. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *48*(7), 42–46.

Kandasamy, N., Soldatic, K., & Samararatne, D. (2017). Peace, justice and disabled women's advocacy: Tamil women with disabilities in rural post-conflict Sri Lanka. *Medicine, Conflict and* Survival, 33(1), 41–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/13623699.2016.1237101

Kandyan Law Ordinance, No. 39 of 1938. https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/kandyan-law-2/

Kandyan Marriage and Divorce Act, No. 44 of 1952.

Kapoor, I. (2004). Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World 'Other'. *Third World Quarterly*, *25*(4), 627–647. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590410001678898

Keerawella, G. (2013). *Post-war Sri Lanka: Is peace a hostage of the military victory?* International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Kember, D., McKay, J., Sinclair, K., & Wong, F. (2008). A four-category scheme for coding and assessing the level of reflection in written work. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, *33*(4), 369–379. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930701293355

Khader, S. (2015). Do Muslim women need freedom? *Politics and Gender*, *1*(4), 1–27.

Klarman, M. J. (1991). The Puzzling Resistance to Political Process Theory. *Va. L. Rev.*, *77*, 747.

Kleinman, A., & Kleinman, J. (1996). The appeal of experience; The dismay of images: Cultural appropriations of suffering in our times. *Daedalus (Cambridge, Mass.)*, *125*(1), 1–23.

Kodikara, C. (2009). *The struggle for equal political representation of women in Sri Lanka: A stocktaking report for the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment and the United Nations Development Programme*. United Nations Development Programme.

Kodikara, C. (2012). *Only until the rice is cooked? The Domestic Violence Act, familial ideology and cultural narratives in Sri Lanka*. International Centre for Ethnic Studies. https://ices.lk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Only-Until-the-Rice-is-Cooked.pdf

Kodikara, C. (2018). Battered wives or dependent mothers? Negotiating familial ideology in law. *Violence Against Women*, *24*(8), 901–921. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801217724452

Kodikara, C. (2019). Connecting the egregious and the everyday: Addressing impunity for sexual violence in Sri Lanka. In P. Gready & S. Robins (Eds.), *From transitional to transformative justice* (pp. 191–214). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316676028.009

Kodikara, C., & Emmanuel, S. (2016). Global discourses and local realities: Armed conflict and the pursuit of justice. In K. Jayawardena & K. Pinto-Jayawardena (Eds.), *The search for justice: The Sri Lankan papers* (pp. 1–35). Zubaan.

Koens, C., & Gunawardana, S. J. (2020). A continuum of participation: Rethinking Tamil women's political participation and agency in post-war Sri Lanka. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *23*(3), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2020.1734043

Kottegoda, S., Maunaguru, S., Perera, S., & Emmanuel, S. (2012). *Women and new media in the margins of the Sri Lankan state*. Gender Is Citizenship/IDRC.

Kottegoda, S., Samuel, K., & Emmanuel, S. (2008). Reproductive health concerns in six conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka. *Reproductive Health Matters*, *16*(31), 75–82. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(08)31359-7

Krishnan, S. I. (2012). *The transition to civilian life of teenage girls and young women ex-combatants: A case study from Batticaloa*. International Centre for Ethnic Studies. https://doi.org/10.1097/WTF.0b013e328348dffb

Kumarage, A. (2019). Genderizing life, choice, and rights: Asking the woman question in the abortion debate. *Virginia Journal of Social Policy & the Law*, *26*(2), 137.

Kuru-Utumpala, J. (2013). Butching it up: An analysis of same-sex female masculinity in Sri Lanka. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *15*(Suppl. 2), S153–S165. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2013.807520

Kylasam Iyer, D. (2017). Development in South Asia: A critique [Technical presentation]. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3008429

Kymlicka, W. (1989). Liberal individualism and liberal neutrality. *Ethics, 99(4)*, 883–905. https://doi.org/10.1086/293125

Kymlicka, W. (1991). *Liberalism, community, and culture*. Clarendon Press.

Lapadat, J., & Lindsay, A. (1999). Transcription in research and practice: From standardization of technique to interpretive positionings. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *5*(1), 64–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049900500104

Lawrence, E. S. (2015). Witchcraft, sorcery, violence: matrilineal and decolonial reflections. In *Talking it Through*, 55–74. ANU Press.

Lazreg, M. (1994). *The eloquence of silence: Algerian women in question*. Routledge.

Levinas, E. (1998). Useless suffering. In R. Bemasconi & D. Wood (Eds.), *The provocation of Emmanuel Levinas: Rethinking the Other* (pp. 156–167). Routledge.

Lindio-McGovern, L. (2007). Neo-liberal globalization in the Philippines: Its impact on Filipino women and their forms of resistance. *Journal of Developing Societies*, *23*(1–2), 15–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X0602300202

Loken, M., Lake, M., & Cronin-Furman, K. (2018). Deploying justice: Strategic accountability for wartime sexual violence. *International Studies Quarterly*, *62*(4), 751–764. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy039

Lugones, M. (2003). *Pilgrimages/peregrinajes: Theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions.* Rowman & Littlefield.

Lugones, M. (2008). The coloniality of gender. *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise*, *2*(2), 1–17. https://globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/sites/globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/files/documents/v2d2_Lugones.pdf

Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, *25*(4), 742–759. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x

Lyons, L. (2000). A state of ambivalence: feminism in a Singaporean women's organisation. Asian Studies Review, 24(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357820008713257

Lyons, L. (2007). Dignity overdue: Women's rights activism in support of foreign domestic workers in Singapore. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *35*(3/4), 106-122.

Maatram Foundation. (2015). Understanding post-war land issues in northern Sri Lanka. *The Maatram Foundation.*

Madison, D. (2006). The dialogic performative in critical ethnography. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *26*(4), 320-324.

Magill, K. R. (2021). Identity, consciousness, and agency: Critically reflexive social studies praxis and the social relations of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 104*, Article 103382. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103382

Mahmood, S. (2005) *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject.* Princeton University Press.

Makshood, A. (2017). *The ideal of liberation: Women in Sri Lanka's civil war* [Honors thesis]. University at Albany, State University of New York. https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=history_honors

Maunaguru, S. (1995). "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman' In Projects of Protest and Control." In Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka, edited by Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, 158–175. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.

Manchanda, R. (2004). Gender Conflict and Displacement: Contesting "Infantilisation" of Forced Migrant Women. *Economic and Political Weekly, 39*(37), 4179–4186.

Manchanda, R. (2005). Women's agency in peace building: Gender relations in post-conflict reconstruction. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *40*(44–45), 4737–4745.

Manogaran, C., & Pfaffenberger, B. (1994). *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and identity*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429315022

Mapping Militant Organizations. (2018, June). *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam*. Stanford University. https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/liberation-tigers-tamil-elam

Marecek, J. (2006). Young women's suicide in Sri Lanka: Cultural, ecological, and psychological factors. *Asian Journal of Counselling*, *13*(1), 63-92.

Marecek, J. (2016). Invited reflection. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *40*(2), 177–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684316641090

Marecek, J., & Appuhamilage, U. M. (2011). Present but unnamed: Feminisms and psychologies in Sri Lanka. In A. Rutherford, R. Capdevila, V. Undurti, & I. Palmary (Eds.), *Handbook of international feminisms* (pp. 315–333). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-9869-9_15

Marecek, J., & Senadheera, C. (2012). 'I drank it to put an end to me': Narrating girls' suicide and self-harm in Sri Lanka. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *46*(1–2), 53–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/006996671104600204

Martin, Hanson, S., & Fontaine, D. (2007). What Counts as Activism?: The role of individuals in creating change. *Women's Studies Quarterly, 35*(3/4), 78–94.

Martin, M. (2017). Sri Lanka's ex-combatant rehabilitation programme: Reconstructing gendered identities. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 12*(1), 79–84. https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2017.1281755

Matsuda, M. J. (1991). Beside my sister, facing the enemy: Legal theory out of coalition. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1183–1192. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229035

Matthews, B. (2009). The limits of international engagement in human rights situations: The case of Sri Lanka. *Pacific Affairs, 82*(4), 577–596. https://doi.org/10.5509/2009824577

McGilvray, D. B. (1983). Paraiyar drummers of Sri Lanka: Consensus and constraint in an untouchable caste. *American Ethnologist, 10*(1), 97–115. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1983.10.1.02a00060

McGilvray, D. B. (1998). Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim ethnicity in regional perspective. *Contributions to Indian Sociology, 32*(2), 433–483. https://doi.org/10.1177/006996679803200213

McGilvray, D. B. (2008). *Crucible of conflict: Tamil and Muslim society on the east coast of Sri Lanka*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822389187

McGilvray, D. B. (2011). Sri Lankan Muslims: Between ethno-nationalism and the global *ummah*. *Nations and Nationalism, 17*(1), 45–64. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00460.x

McGilvray, D. B., & Raheem, M. (2007). *Muslim perspectives on the Sri Lankan conflict*. East-West Center.

Mendis, P. (2004). *Training and employment of people with disabilities: Sri Lanka 2003*. International Labour Office.

Mendez, J. B. (2008). Globalizing scholar activism: Opportunities and dilemmas through a feminist lens. In C. R. HALE (Ed.), *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (1st ed., pp. 136–163). University of California Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pncnt.11

Menon, N. (2012). *Seeing like a feminist*. Penguin UK.

Merrill, C. A. (2014). Crafting a feminist Dalit consciousness in translation. *World Literature Today, 88*(3–4), 52–56. https://doi.org/10.1353/wlt.2014.0242

Mignolo, W. D. (2007). Introduction. *Cultural Studies, 21*(2–3), 155–167. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162498

Mihlar, F. (2019). Religious change in a minority context: Transforming Islam in Sri Lanka. *Third World Quarterly*, *40*(12), 2153–2169. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1632186

Miller, J. (2002). Violence and coercion in Sri Lanka's commercial sex industry: Intersections of gender, sexuality, culture, and the law. *Violence Against Women, 8*(9), 1044–1073. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780102401101737

Miller, J., & Nichols, A. (2012). Identity, sexuality and commercial sex among Sri Lankan *nachchi*. *Sexualities*, *15*(5–6), 554–569. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460712446120

Mills, S. (2003). *Michel Foucault*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203380437

Minority Rights Group International. (2013). *Living with insecurity: Marginalization and sexual violence against women in north and east Sri Lanka*. https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/old-site-downloads/download-1297-Living-with-insecurity-Marginalization-and-sexual-violence-against-women-in-north-and-east-Sri-Lanka.pdf

Mohammed, P. (2003). Like sugar in coffee: Third wave feminism and the Caribbean. *Social and Economic Studies*, *52*(3), 5–30.

Mohammed, P. (2018). The pedagogy of difference: Co-producing feminist consciousness across borders. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *19*(3), Article 2.

Mohanty, C. M. (1988). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist Review*, *30*, 61–88. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42

Mohanty, C. M. (2003). *Feminism without borders*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822384649

Mohanty, C. T. (2006). Foreword. In *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India* (NED-New edition, pp. ix–xvi). University of Minnesota Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttt2nn.3

Morris, A. (2000). Reflections on social movement theory: Criticisms and proposals. *Contemporary sociology*, *29*(3), 445-454.

Munasinghe, V., & Celermajer, D. (2017). Acute and everyday violence in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *47*(4), 615–640. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1336783

Muslim Interstate Succession Ordinance, No. 10 of 1931. https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/muslim-intestate-succession-4/

Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, No. 13 of 1951.

Muslim Personal Law Reform Action Group. (n.d.). *What is the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA) 1951?* https://mplreforms.com/aboutmmda/

Nadarajah, S., & Sriskandarajah, D. (2005). Liberation struggle or terrorism? The politics of naming the LTTE. *Third World Quarterly*, *26*(1), 87–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000322928

Nagalia, S. (2019, March 16). Replacing silence with speech: Wartime sexual violence in Sri Lanka [Review of the book *The search for justice: The Sri Lanka papers*, by K. Pinto-Jayawardena & K. Jayawardena (Eds.)]. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *54*(11). https://www.epw.in/journal/2019/11/book-reviews/replacing-silence-speech.html

Nagar, R. (2006). *Playing with fire: feminist thought and activism through seven lives in India*. University of Minnesota Press.

Nagengast, C., & Kearney, M. (1990). Mixtec ethnicity: Social identity, political consciousness, and political activism. *Latin American research review*, *25*(2), 61-91.

Narayan, U. (1997). *Dislocating cultures: Identities, traditions, and third world feminism*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203707487

Narayan, K. (2012). *Alive in the writing: Crafting ethnography in the company of Chekhov*. University of Chicago Press.

Nayar, P. K. (2006). Bama's *Karukku*: Dalit autobiography as testimonio. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *41*(2), 83–100. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989406065773

Nesiah, V. (2003). The ground beneath her feet: "Third World" feminisms. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *4*(3), 30–38.

Nesiah, V. (2012). Uncomfortable alliances: Women, peace and security in Sri Lanka. In A. Loomba & R. Lukose (Eds.), *South Asian feminisms* (pp. 139–161). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11g96jz.9

Nesiah, V. (2013, July). *"The law, this violent thing": Dissident memory and democratic futures*. Neelan Tiruchelvam Memorial Lecture, Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

New Zealand Sri Lankan community leader says president's resignation a 'big turning point'. (2022, July 10). *RNZ*. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/470659/new-zealand-sri-lankan-community-leader-says-president-s-resignation-a-big-turning-point

Ng, C., Mohamad, M., & Hui, t. b. (2006). *Feminism and the women's movement in Malaysia: An unsung (r)evolution*. Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203099315

Nichols, A. J. (2014). Intersections of gender and sexuality in police abuses against transgender sex workers in Sri Lanka. In D. Peterson & V. R. Panfil (Eds.), *Handbook of LGBT communities, crime, and justice* (pp. 165–182). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-9188-0_9

Nzegwu, N. U. (2006). *Family matters: feminist concepts in African philosophy of culture*. State University of New York Press.

Offe, C. (1985). Disorganized capitalism: Contemporary transformations of work and politics.

Okin, S. M. (1989). *Justice, gender, and the family*. Basic Books.

Orjuela, C., Herath, D., & Lindberg, J. (2016). Corrupt peace? Corruption and ethnic divides in post-war Sri Lanka. *Journal of South Asian Development, 11*(2), 149–174. https://doi.org/10.1177/0973174116648818

O'Sullivan, M. (1997). Household entitlements during wartime: The experience of Sri Lanka. *Oxford Development Studies, 25*(1), 95–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600819708424124

Oyewumi, O. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (NED - New edition). University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctttt0vh

Ouellet, E. (2011). Institutional analysis of counterinsurgency: The Case of the IPKF in Sri Lanka (1987–1990). *Defence Studies, 11*(3), 470–496. https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2011.630173

Overton, L. R. A. (2007). *Flirting with disaster: Gendered impacts of women's access to land and housing in post-tsunami Sri Lanka* [Bachelor's dissertation, Middlesex University].

Parasram, A. R. (2017). *Becoming the state: Territorializing Ceylon, 1815–1848* [Doctoral thesis, Carleton University]. CURVE. https://curve.carleton.ca/049f40a2-acb2-4d1d-876a-dc0811fa8310

Paravisini-Gebert, L. (1997). Decolonizing Feminism. *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean women in the twentieth century, 63*, 3-17.

Parliament of Sri Lanka. (n.d.). *Constitution*. https://www.parliament.lk/constitution/main

Parvez Butt, A., & Sekaram, S. (2019). *Smashing spatial patriarchy: Shifting gender norms driving sexual and gender-based violence on public transport in Sri Lanka*. Oxfam.

Peoples Dispatch. (2022, July 12). PM resigns, President flees: It's all happening in Sri Lanka *Monthly Review*. https://mronline.org/2022/07/12/pm-resigns-president-flees/

Perera, A. (n.d.). *Theertha – a journey by a collective of restless artists*. Theertha. http://theertha.org/about/theertha-%C2%AD-a-journey-by-a-collective-of-restless-artists/

Perera, S. (2001). *The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: A historical and sociopolitical outline*. World Bank.

Perera, S. (2018, August 21). *Reproductive justice for the mothers of the disappeared in Sri Lanka*. Resurj. https://resurj.org/reflection/reproductive-justice-for-the-mothers-of-the-disappeared-in-sri-lanka/

Perera, S., & Ibrahim, Z. (2021). Somewhere only we know: Gender, sexualities, and sexual behaviour on the internet in Sri Lanka. Association for Progressive Communications.

Perera-Mubarak, K. N. (2013). Positive responses, uneven experiences: Intersections of gender, ethnicity, and location in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. *Gender, Place & Culture, 20*(5), 664–685. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2012.709828

Perera-Rajasingham, N. (2019). *Assembling ethnicities in neoliberal times: Ethnographic fictions and Sri Lanka's war*. Northwestern University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpv5015

Pfaffenberger, B. (1994). [Review of the book *Computing myths, class realities: An ethnography of technology and working people in Sheffield, England*, by D. Hakken & B. Andrews]. *Library Quarterly, 64*(4), 466–467. https://doi.org/10.1086/602732

Phoenix, A. (2008). Analysing narrative contexts. *Doing narrative research*, 64-77.

Pinnewala, P. (2009). Good women, martyrs, and survivors: A theoretical framework for South Asian women's responses to partner violence. *Violence Against Women, 15*(1), 81–105. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801208328005

Pulido, L. (2008). FAQs: Frequently (un) asked questions about being a scholar activist. In *Engaging contradictions* (pp. 341-366). University of California Press.

Quijano, A., & Ennis, M. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South, 1*(3), 533–580. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005

Raheem, M. (2014). Foreword. In S. A. Saroor, *Our struggles, our stories* (pp. 5–9). Women's Action Network.

Rai, S. (2002). *Gender and the political economy of development*. Polity Press.

Rajasingham-Senanayake, D. (1999). Democracy and the problem of representation: The making of bi-polar ethnic identity in post/colonial Sri Lanka. In J. Pfaff-Czarnecka, D. Rajasingham-Senanayake, A. Nandy, & E. T. Gomez, *Ethnic futures: The state and identity politics in Asia* (pp. 99–134). SAGE.

Rajasingham-Senanayake, D. (2004). Between reality and representation: Women's agency in war and post-conflict Sri Lanka. *Cultural Dynamics*, *16*(2–3), 141–168. https://doi.org/10.1177/0921374004047741

Ram, K. (2015). The silences in dominant discourses. *South Asia*, *38*(1), 119–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2014.989657

Ramesh, A. (2020). Dalit Women, Vulnerabilities, and Feminist Consciousness. *Economic and Political Weekly* (pp. 1-14).

Razi, H. (2019). Long overdue: breaking down the minimum age of marriage in Sri Lanka. *Groundviews*. https://groundviews.org/2019/07/15/long-overdue-breaking-down-the-minimum-age-of-marriage-in-sri-lanka/

Rege, S. (1995). The hegemonic appropriation of sexuality: The case of the Lavani performers of Maharashtra. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, *29*(1-2), 23–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/006996679502900100 3

Rege, S. (1998). Dalit women talk differently: A critique of "difference" and towards a Dalit feminist standpoint position. *Economic and Political Weekly, 33*(44), WS39–WS46.

Rege, S. (2010). Education as "Trutiya Ratna": Towards Phule-Ambedkarite feminist pedagogical practice. *Economic and Political Weekly, 45*(44/45), 88–98.

Rezwan. (2022, April 18). Are ongoing peaceful, creative and spontaneous protests Sri Lanka's 'Arab Spring moment'? *GlobalVoices*. https://globalvoices.org/2022/04/18/are-ongoing-peaceful-creative-and-spontaneous-protests-sri-lankas-arab-spring-moment/

Richardson, J. M. (2005). *Paradise poisoned: Learning about conflict, terrorism, and development from Sri Lanka's civil wars*. International Centre for Ethic Studies.

Riessman, C. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. SAGE.

Riessman, C., & Quinney, L. (2010). Narrative in social work: A critical review. *Qualitative Research Methods*, *4*(4), 391–412. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325005058643

Roces, M. (2010). *Women's Movements in Asia*. Routledge.

Rochat, P. (2009). *Others in mind*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812484

Rodgers-Healey, D. (2013). Political leaders and the media: A relationship that impacts on the nation's consciousness. *Advancing Women in Leadership, 33*, 87–95.

Roopnarine, L. (2016). Interview with Patricia Mohammed: The status of Indo-Caribbean women: From indenture to the contemporary period. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *17*(3), Article 2.

Roy, S. (Ed.). (2012). *New south Asian feminisms: Paradoxes and possibilities*. Zed Books.

Roy, A. (2020, April 4). 'The pandemic is a portal.' *Financial Times*. https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca

Rupesinghe, K. N. (1988). Ethnic conflicts in South Asia: The case of Sri Lanka and the Indian Peace-keeping *Peace Research*, *25*(4), 337–350. https://doi.org/10.1177/002234338802500402

Ruwanpura, K. N. (2008). Temporality of disasters: The politics of women's livelihoods 'after' the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 29*(3), 325–340. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9493.2008.00327.x

Ruwanpura, K. N. (2009). Waves of reality: Spatial and temporal dynamics of post-tsunami development efforts in Sri Lanka – a gender analysis. In N. de Mel, K. N. Ruwanpura, & G. Samarasinghe, G. (Eds.), *After the waves: The impact of the tsunami on women in Sri Lanka* (pp. 65–83). Social Scientists' Association.

Sabaratnam, L. (1987). The boundaries of the state and the state of ethnic boundaries: Sinhala-Tamil relations in Sri Lankan history. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *10*(3), 291–316. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1987.9993570

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

Samararatne, D., & Soldatic, K. (2019). Transitioning with disability: Justice for women with disabilities in post-war Sri Lanka. In R. Shackel & L. Fiske (Eds.), *Rethinking transitional gender justice* (pp. 315–337). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77890-7_16

Samaraweera, H. U. S., & Samarasinghe, B. G. I. M. (2016). Sexuality as a taboo: Social discrimination against LGT identities and sex workers in urban Sri Lanka. *KDU Library*. http://ir.kdu.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/345/1167/FMSH-007.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Samuel, K. (2006). *A hidden history: Women's activism for peace in Sri Lanka, 1982–2002*. Social Scientists' Association.

Sangari K. & Vaid S. (2006). *Recasting women: essays in colonial history*. Kali for Women (Zubaan).

Sangtin Writers Collective & Richa Nagar. (2006). *Playing with fire: Feminist thought and activism through seven lives in India*. University of Minnesota Press.

Saravanan. (2018). *Dalitin kurippuhal* [Notes on Dalits]. Ezhilini Publications.

Sarjoon, A., Yusoff, M. A., & Hussin, N. (2016). Anti-Muslim sentiments and violence: A major threat to ethnic reconciliation and ethnic harmony in post-war Sri Lanka. *Religions*, *7*(10), 125. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7100125

Saroor, S. A. (2014). *Our struggles, our stories.* Women's Action Network.

Sawicki, J. (1991). *Foucault and feminism: Toward a politics of difference in disciplining Foucault*. Routledge.

Schober, J. (2006). Buddhism, violence, and the state in Burma (Myanmar) and Sri Lanka. In L. E. Cady & S. W. Simon (Eds.), *Religion and conflict in South and Southeast Asia* (pp. 61–79). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203967485-13

Schrijvers, J. (1999). Fighters, victims and survivors: Constructions of ethnicity, gender and refugeeness among Tamils in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *12*(3), 307–333. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/12.3.307

Scott, J. W. (1999). *Gender and the politics of history*. Columbia University Press.

Seoighe, R. (2017). *War, denial and nation-building in Sri Lanka: After the end*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56324-4

Sharma, M., & Tamang, S. (Eds.). (2016). *A difficult transition: The Nepal papers*. Zubaan.

Shocking, shameful; about 1,000 abortions daily in Sri Lanka. (2018, July 14). *Daily Mirror*. https://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Shocking-shameful-about-abortions-daily-in-Sri-Lanka-152709.html

Silva, K. T. (1999). Caste, ethnicity and problems of national identity in Sri Lanka. *Sociological Bulletin*, *48*(1–2), 201–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022919990111

Silva, K. T. (2020). *Identity, infection and fear: A preliminary analysis of COVID-19 drivers and responses in Sri Lanka*. International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Simien, E. M., & Clawson, R. A. (2004). The intersection of race and gender: An examination of black feminist consciousness, race consciousness, and policy attitudes. *Social Science Quarterly*, *85*(3), 793–810. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0038-4941.2004.00245.x

Singh, S. (2019). Easter Attacks in Sri Lanka: Terror and the Rise of Violent Extremism. *Economic and Political Weekly*.

Siriwardane-de Zoysa, R. (2018). *Fishing, mobility and settlerhood*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78837-1

Sitrin, M. (2012). Everyday revolutions: horizontalism and autonomy in Argentina. (1st ed., Vol. 57544). NBN International.

Sivamohan, S. (2016). Territorial claims, home, land, and movement: Women's history of violence and resistance. In K. Jayawardena & K. Pinto-Jayawardena (Eds.), *The search for justice: The Sri Lanka papers* (pp. 369–399). Zubaan.

Sivanesan, S. (2020). Movements of Minorities: AusLankan Struggles for Justice. In *A Sense of Viidu* (pp. 27–46). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-1369-5_2

Sivasundaram, S. (2007). Tales of the land: British geography and Kandyan resistance in Sri Lanka, c. 1803–1850. *Modern Asian Studies*, *41*(5), 925–965.

Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (3rd ed.). Zed Books.

Somasundaram, D., & Sivayokan, S. (2013). Rebuilding community resilience in a post-war context: Developing insight and recommendations – a qualitative study in Northern Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, *7*(1), 3–3. https://doi.org/10.1186/1752-4458-7-3

Spencer, J. (2013a). A certain gesture: Reflections on the murder of Sivaram. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, *26*(1), 83–99. https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12009

Spencer, J. (2013b). Foreword. In D. Hughes, *Violence, torture and memory in Sri Lanka: Life after terror*. Routledge.

Spencer, J., Goodhand, J., Hasbullah, S. H., Klem, B., Korf, B., & Silva, K. T. (2015). *Checkpoint, temple, church and mosque: A collaborative ethnography of war and peace*. Pluto Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183p5r9

Spivak, G. C. (1978). Feminism and critical theory. *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, *1*(3), 241–246.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). Macmillan Education.

Spivak, G. C. (1993). Echo. *New Literary History, 24*(1), 17–43.

Spivak, G. C. (2004). Righting Wrongs. *The South Atlantic Quarterly, 103*(2-3), 523–581. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-103-2-3-523

Spivak, G. C. (2013). *The Spivak reader: Selected works of Gayati Chakravorty Spivak*. Routledge.

Sri Lanka Brief. (n.d.). MMDA. http://srilankabrief.org/tag/mmda/

Sri Lankan Civil War. (2022, September 29). *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sri_Lankan_Civil_War&oldid=1113073346

Srilankandiasporaweb. (2011, April 2). *Interview with Sunila Abeysekera = From Sri Lanka* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pu1UgSVmF6Y

Sriskandarajah, D. (2005). Socio-economic inequality and ethno-political conflict: Some observations from Sri Lanka. *Contemporary South Asia*, *14*(3), 341–356. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584930500463792

Sriskanthadas, B. (2016, September 1). Remembering the Krishanthi Kumaraswamy case. *Groundviews*. https://groundviews.org/2016/09/01/the-krishanthi-rape-and-four-murders/

Stephen, C. (2009, November 16). Feminism and Dalit Women in India. *Countercurrents*. http://www.countercurrents.org/stephen161109.htm

Sullivan, S. (2006). *Revealing whiteness: The unconscious habits of white privilege*. Indiana University Press.

Swenden, Sengupta, P., Sarvananthan, M., Surendran, A., & Ruwanpura, K. N. (2022). State Capacity, Ideology and the Management of COVID-19 in South Asia: India and Sri Lanka in Perspective. Journal of South Asian Development, 17(3), 409–415. https://doi.org/10.1177/09731741221124279

Tambiah, S. J. (1986). *Sri Lanka: Ethnic fratricide and the dismantling of democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

Tambiah, S. J. (1992). *Buddhism betrayed?: Religion, politics, and violence in Sri Lanka*. University of Chicago Press.

Tambiah, Y. (2002). *Women and governance in South Asia: Re-imagin*ing *the state*. International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Tambiah, Y. (2005). Turncoat bodies: Sexuality and sex work under militarization in Sri Lanka. *Gender & Society*, *19*(2), 243–261. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243204273076

Tatum, S. L. (2019). Black female sex workers. In J. Battle & S. N. Barnes (Eds.), *Black sexualities* (pp. 311–326). Rutgers University Press. https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813548166-015

Tekwani, S. (2020). Political violence in South Asia, 1995–2020. In A. L. Vuving (Ed.), *Hindsight, insight, foresight: Thinking about security in the Indo-Pacific* (pp. 91–110). Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies.

Thangarajah, P. (2013). *Strengthening of Legal Protection for LGBT in Sri Lanka: Road to Decriminalization*. Equal Ground. Colombo.

Thangarajah, P. (2014). Forging Feminist Alliances: A front Line Struggle of War Affected Northern Women. In S. A. Saroor (Ed.), *Our struggles, our stories* (pp. 67-94). Women's Action Network.

Thangarajah, P. (2016). Rape and the Evidentiary Process in Sri Lanka. In K. Jayawardena & K. Pinto-Jayawardena (Eds.), *The search for justice: The Sri Lanka papers* (pp. 96-105). Zubaan.

Thesawalamai Regulation, No. 18 of 1806. https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/the-tesawalamai-3/

Thiranagama, S. (2009). A new morning?: Reoccupying home in the aftermath of violence in Sri Lanka. In S. Jansen & S. Löfving (Eds.), *Struggles for home: Violence, hope and the movement of people* (pp. 129–148). Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781845458607-007

Thiranagama, S. (2011). *In my mother's house: Civil war in Sri Lanka*. University of Pennsylvania Press. https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812205114

Thiranagama, S. (2013). Claiming the state: Postwar reconciliation in Sri Lanka. *Humanity, 4*(1), 93–116. https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2013.0011

Thiranagama, S. (2018). The civility of strangers? Caste, ethnicity, and living together in postwar Jaffna, Sri Lanka. *Anthropological Theory*, *18*(2–3), 357–381. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499617744476

Thiranagama, S. (2019). Respect your neighbor as yourself: Neighborliness, caste, and community in South India. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *61*(2), 269–300. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417519000057

Thiranagama, S. (2020). Afterword: A "division of laborers." *Anthropology of Work Review*, *41*(2), 133–137. https://doi.org/10.1111/awr.12200

Thiruchandran, S. (2021). *Caste and its multiple manifestations: A study of the caste system in Northern Sri Lanka*. Bay Owl Press.

Thorgerdur, T. (2007). Equal opportunities for all: Intersectionality as a theoretical tool to move equality policies forward. *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* (Women, Gender & Research, (1), 20–31.

Timulak, L., & Elliott, R. (2019). Taking stock of descriptive-interpretative qualitative psychotherapy research: Issues and observations from the front line. Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 19(1), 8–15. https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12197

Tomar, R. (2013). Dalit feminism: A transformation of rejection into resistance. *The Criterion*, *4*(12), 1–8.

Traffic at Indian ports increases due to Sri Lanka crisis. (2022). *Maritime Gateway*. https://www.maritimegateway.com/traffic-at-indian-ports-increases-due-to-sri-lanka-crisis/

Trawick, M. (2007). *Enemy lines: childhood, warfare, and play in Batticaloa*. University of California Press.

Truth, S. (2017). *The narrative of Sojourner Truth*. Open Road Integrated Media.

Ungunmerr-Baumann, M. R. (2002). *Dadirri: Inner deep listening and quiet still awareness.* http://www.dadirri.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Dadirri-Inner-Deep-Listening-M-R-Ungunmerr-Bauman-Refl1.pdf

University Teachers for Human Rights. (1989, November). *Report No. 3*. https://www.uthr.org/Reports/Report3/Report3.htm

University Teachers for Human Rights. (1999, April). *Gaps in the Krishanthy Kumarasamy case: Disappearances & accountability*. https://uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport12.htm

University Teachers for Human Rights. (2005). *Political killings and Sri Lanka's stalled peace*. https://www.uthr.org/SpecialReports/spreport18.htm

Unnithan, M., & de Zordo, S. (2018). Re-situating abortion: Bio-politics, global health and rights in neo-liberal times. *Global Public Health*, *13*(6), 657–661. https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2018.1445271

Uyangoda, J. (2005). Ethnic conflict, the state and the tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *6*(3), 341–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370500169979

Uyangoda, J. (2007). *Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: Changing dynamics* (Policy Studies 32). East-West Center.

Uyangoda, J. (2010). Sri Lanka in 2009: From civil war to political uncertainties. *Asian Survey*, *50*(1), 104–111. https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2010.50.1.104

Uyangoda, J. (2015). The LTTE and Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka: Political/cultural grievance, unsuccessful negotiations, and organizational evolution. In J. S. Chima (Ed.), *Ethnic subnationalist insurgencies in South Asia* (pp. 119–141). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315733135-6

van Hateren, J. H. (2015). The origin of agency, consciousness, and free will. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, *14*(4), 979–1000. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-014-9396-5

Vargas, J. H. C. (2008). Activist scholarship: Limits and possibilities in times of black genocide. In *Engaging contradictions* (pp. 164-182). University of California Press.

Vithanagama, R. (Ed.). (2018). *Exploring women's empowerment*. International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and woman: rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective*. Oxford University Press.

Walby, S. (2001). Against epistemological chasms: The science question in feminism revisited. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *26*(2), 485–509. https://doi.org/10.1086/495601

Walker. A. (1984). In search of our mothers' gardens: womanist prose. Women's Press.

Walker, R. (2012). 'Speak to the women as the men have all gone': Women's support networks in Eastern Sri Lanka. *New South Asian Feminisms: Paradoxes and Possibilities,* 151-168.

Wallerstein, I. (1976). Semi-peripheral countries and the contemporary world crisis. *Theory and Society, 3(4),* 461–483. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00161293

Wallerstein, N. B., & Duran, B. (2006). Using community-based participatory research to address health disparities. *Health Promotion Practice*, *7*(3), 312–323. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839906289376

Ward, S. E. (2019). Violating the state body: Sexual violence and control in the Sri Lankan civil war as nation-building in the body politic. *Interdisciplinary Political Studies, 5*(1), 157–187.

Weber, L. (2010). *Understanding race, class, gender, and sexuality.* Oxford University Press.

Weerawardhana, C. (2019). *Decolonising peacebuilding: Managing conflict from Northern Ireland to Sri Lanka and beyond*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Weerawardhana, C. (2017a). Gender and ethnic politics in Sri Lanka's Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. *Socialism and Democracy*, *31*(2), 73–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2017.1328779

Weerawardhana, C. (2017b). Just ordinary citizens? Towards a comparative portrait of the political immigrant. *Ethnic and Racial Studies Review*, *40*(3), 576–578. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2016.1232429

Weerawardhana, C. (2017c). Paradigms of [in]tolerance? On Sri Lanka's *Bodu Bala Sena*, #prezpollsl2015, and transformative dynamics of lived religion. In R. R. Ganzevoort & S. Sremac (Eds.), *Lived religion and the politics of (in)tolerance* (pp. 19–39). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43406-3_2

Weerawardhana, C. (2017d). Profoundly decolonizing?: Reflections on a transfeminist perspective of international relations. *Meridians*, *16*(1), 184–213. https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.16.1.18

Weerawardhana, C. (2018). "What is it about 'fuck off' you don't understand?' The NILRC and politics of the Left in Northern Ireland. *Labor History*, *59*(5), 593–609. https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2018.1467300

Weiss, G. (2011). *The cage: The fight for Sri Lanka and the last days of the Tamil Tigers*. Random House.

Welch, S. (2015). *Existential eroticism: a feminist approach to understanding women's oppression-perpetuating choices*. Lexington Books.

Wickramagamage, C. (2004). "Her body, her right?": Interrogating the discourse on abortion In Sri Lanka. *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, *27*(1–2), 17–59. https://doi.org/10.4038/sljss.v27i1.7410

Wickramasinghe, N. (2006). *Sri Lanka in the modern age: A history of contested identities*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Wickramasinghe, N. (2009). After the war: A new patriotism in Sri Lanka? *Journal of Asian Studies*, *68*(4), 1045–1054. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911809990738

Wijesiriwardena, S. (2016, October 20). It's really time we stopped rejecting feminism. *Subha M Wijesiriwardena*. https://blogsmw.com/2016/10/20/its-really-time-we-stopped-rejecting-feminism/

Wijesiriwardena, S. (2022). Porn, sexuality and expression in Sri Lanka: Feminist debates and interventions. *Porn Studies*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2022.2028666

Wijesiriwardena, S., de Silva, K., Divakalala, C., & Issadeen, H. C. (2020). Acts of agency: Exploring a feminist approach to abortion research in Sri Lanka. *South Asian Survey*, *27*(2), 117–140. https://doi.org/10.1177/0971523120947070

Wijewardene, S. (2007). "But no one has explained to me who I am now . . .": "Trans" self-perceptions in Sri Lanka. In S. E. Wieringa, E. Blackwood, & A. Bhaiya (Eds.), *Women's sexualities and masculinities in a globalizing Asia* (pp. 101–116). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230604124_6

Willarachchi, D. D. L. (2017). The gaze, image, and (hi)stories: A critical review of the representation of the rape and murder of Vithya Sivaloganathan. *KDU Library*. http://ir.kdu.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/345/1814/001.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Wilson, A. J. (1979). *Politics in Sri Lanka, 1947–1979*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-17718-9

Wilson, A. J. (2000). *Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism: Its origins and development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*. UBC Press.

Wipulasena, A. (2018, September 23). The battle against homophobia in Sri Lanka. *Sunday Observer*. http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2018/09/23/issues/battle-against-homophobia-sri-lanka

Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 63–94). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857028020.n4

Wodak, R., & Reisigl, M. (2005). Discourse and racism. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 372–389). Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470753460.ch20

Women and Media Collective. (n.d.). *Women's submissions to the PRC on constitutional reform*s. https://womenandmedia.org/si/womens-submissions-to-the-prc-on-constitutional-reforms/

Women and Media Collective. (2010). *Sri Lanka shadow report: To the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngo/wmd_srilanka48.pdf

Women and Media Collective. (2017). *Sri Lanka shadow report: To the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).* https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/LKA/INT_CEDAW_NGO_LKA_26306_E.pdf

Women and Media Collective & OutRight Action International. (2018). *Manual for practicing counselors: Addressing domestic and family violence faced by lesbian women, bisexual women and transpersons in Sri Lanka*. https://outrightinternational.org/content/manual-practicing-counselors-addressing-domestic-and-family-violence-faced-lesbian-women

Wooffitt, R. (2005). *Conversation analysis and discourse analysis.* SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208765

Wylie, A. (2004). Why standpoint matters. In S. Harding (Ed.), *The feminist standpoint theory reader* (pp. 339–352). Routledge.

Yoo, H. (2014). *Time for me and time for us: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of accompanying spouses' participation in conference travel* [Doctoral thesis, University of Waikato]. Research Commons. https://hdl.handle.net/10289/8790

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist politics. *The European Journal of Women's Studies, 13*(3), 193–209. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506806065752

Yuval-Davis, N. (2011). *Power, intersectionality and the politics of belonging* (FREIA Working Paper No. 75). Aalborg University.

Zarkov, D. (2001). The body of the other man: Sexual violence and the construction of masculinity, sexuality and ethnicity in Croatian media. In C. Moser & F. Clark (Eds.), *Victims, perpetrators or actors? Gender, armed conflict and political violence* (pp. 69–82). Zed Books.

Zarkov, D. (2008). *Gender, violent conflict and development*. Zubaan.

Zepeda, C. S. (2006). *The language of hegemony: Discourse, power and freedom in El Salvador's neoliberal development agenda: The CAFTA case*. Institute of Social Studies.

APPENDIX 1: DOCTORAL RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET[7]

Greetings!

Thank you for agreeing to meet today. I am pleased to be here with you.

XX (name of the key informant) must have briefed you. My doctoral research aims to answer the question: In contexts of historical violence and the troubling legacy of social, cultural and ideological divisions, how do young womxn activists sustain their (feminist) consciousness to work for social change in post-war social justice movements even as divisions and difficulties persist?

> *"This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email alpss-ethics@waikato.ac.nz , Division of Arts, Law, Psychology and Social Sciences , University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240."*

Today, I am here to know more about when and how you became an activist and the kind of activism you do. After today, I might come back to you for further information and/or clarification if need be. I am happy to provide a summary of our conversation in a few weeks if you are willing to meet again. You could share your preferences concerning this at the end of this conversation.

I have been an activist since my teenage years. In the 1990s, as a young person, I mostly helped the adults with the chores of collecting immediate relief items such as food and clothing for people affected by bombing and shelling, sorting them out, and delivering them to the people in need at various temporary shelters. My journeys of activism have been evolving since then.

I carry out this research under the guidance of two academics who reside in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We understand the value of your time and energy put into being part of this study. We are very grateful and profoundly appreciate your contribution. What you share today will only be viewed by me. If you agree, I will record this conversation. If not, I will take notes. I will secure the information and only use it for this study. I will change your name for ethical purposes. No one will be able to track down your real identity or your affiliations. Your real identity will not be shared without consulting with you first if at all, it ever comes to that.

[7] A Tamil translation of this will be given to each participant.

You can ask any question about the study and/or your participation in it. You are also free to decide whether to continue with your participation or not. After this conversation, at any point within two weeks from today, if you decide to withdraw full or a portion of what you have shared, you could contact me on the number given below or through XX (the name of the key informant). If we meet more than once, I will keep a clear record of our conversations and information shared by you on specific dates; so that in the event of any discomfort and/or change of your decision regarding participation, you could withdraw information shared at a given point of time partially or entirely. I will accommodate your preferences to the extent of your satisfaction. You will not be asked to explain your decision. You will not be penalised for it either.

We will talk in Tamil. If you choose to participate, I will request you to sign a consent form. Indeed, it will be destroyed or amended if you choose to withdraw any information later, as I mentioned earlier. We could take breaks as and when you desire.

Please note that there are no direct benefits to you for part-taking in this study. However, I assure that the outcome of this study will be shared with you and many other activists, academics, policymakers, and government officials who genuinely care about making a difference in issues important to you and your community. The outcome of this study might also be published in peer-reviewed books or peer-reviewed journals.

If you have a concern about our conversation or any other aspect of this study, please contact Dr Adele Norris on adele.norris@waikato.ac.nz - if you do not have access to email, you could convey your concerns through XX (name of the key informant).

Should you wish to discuss more or need further information about this study, please reach me on +94773760526 or on cd128@students.waikato.ac.nz

Thank You!!!

APPENDIX 2: DOCTORAL RESEARCH ADULT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM[8]

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

TITLE OF PROJECT: "Young Womxn's[9] Social Activism as Manifesting Purposes and Addressing Legacy of Differences in Sri Lanka": Revisiting Feminist Consciousness from the Global South

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Cayathri Divakalala

CHIEF SUPERVISOR: Dr Adele Norris

I ..... have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing this research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation, and that I can withdraw my participation at any time within two weeks from the date of the interview. During the interview, I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to talk about the topic. I can stop the interview at any time, and I can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time. When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, but I give consent for the researcher to use the interview for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet. I understand that my identity will remain confidential in the presentation of the research findings.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick [✓] the appropriate box for each point.	**YES**	**NO**
I wish to view the transcript of the interview.		
I wish to receive a copy of the findings.		
I am willing to meet more than once.		
I agree to audio record this interview.		

FULL NAME OF PARTICIPANT _____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT _____ DATE

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR _____ DATE

SIGNATURE OF CHIEF SUPERVISOR _____ DATE

[8] The participants will sign the Tamil version of this consent form.
[9] The term 'womxn' is a political choice of being inclusive of a broader range of gendered bodies (trans* and intersex persons) beyond the categorisation of 'women' as a product of the domination by the binary of genders.